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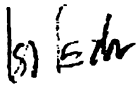

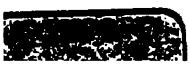

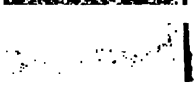

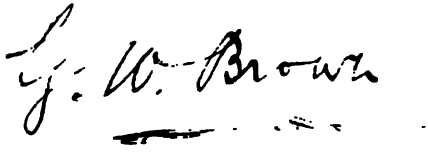

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HE GOT UP EXCITEDLY, AND BEGAN TO PACE THE ROOM.
Frontispiece.] [*Page* 228.

MY LADY FRIVOL

BY

ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

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MY LADY FRIVOL

CHAPTER I

ST. JOHN'S VICARAGE

"Complete the work that thou dost design."
OVID.

THERE is nothing more damping to one's feelings than to arrive at one's destination, after a long absence or a tedious journey, and find no welcoming face on the threshold. To a sensitive person it is like a douche of cold water on a frosty day. But this was Eden Lloyd's experience.

Happily she was prepared for it. There was no surprise on her face when she had rung the bell three times, and the door was still unopened. The door of St. John's Vicarage was never opened very quickly, unless some one happened to be passing at the moment; even the arrival of a

cab full of luggage, and the fact that the guest was expected, did not hurry matters.

It was with a resigned expression, therefore, that Eden rang again—this time lustily—and then hasty footsteps approached, and an untidy-looking maid appeared on the threshold.

"I hope you have not been waiting long, Miss Eden; but I was just cleaning myself, and cook was busy."

"Never mind, Rhoda," returned the young lady, a little wearily—but there was a pleasant smile on her face. "Is Mrs. Lloyd in?"

"Yes, miss, she is in the dining-room, and the master is in his study; but the young ladies are out."

"Very well. Will you please help the cabman with the box?" And then Eden began to collect her other belongings.

It was a warm July afternoon, and Eden's black dress and hat bore signs of a dusty journey. She looked flushed and tired, and her brown hair was a trifle dishevelled.

It was a pleasing face, but with no pretensions to beauty, or even to good looks; the features were irregular, the complexion fair and freckled;

but the kindly, honest eyes were the redeeming point. She had a matured air, and looked older than she really was. She was, in reality, five-and-twenty, only strangers thought she was thirty; but when she smiled they were not quite so sure of it.

Eden was evidently used to waiting; she stood still patiently until her luggage was safely housed; then she paid the cabman and turned to Rhoda.

"I will go and find your mistress now. I suppose they have finished tea?"

"Oh dear, yes, miss, an hour ago; but I can easily fetch you a cup; the water will soon boil."

"Thank you. I shall be very glad of it. How is Miss Ivy, Rhoda?"

"Oh, much the same. She had a bad night, and is very fractious. Shall I bring the tea to the study, Miss Eden?"

"Yes, I think so; perhaps that will be best." And then Eden turned the handle of the door near where she was standing.

The dining-room at St. John's Vicarage was a large, handsome room, only somewhat dark. The bay window was blocked up by a square table loaded with papers; here a lady was busily

writing. As the door opened she said, without turning her head, "I want these letters posted at once, Rhoda."

"Very well; but won't you speak to me first, Rosamond?" observed Eden, in an amused voice. And then Mrs. Lloyd rose with an exclamation of surprise, and kissed her affectionately.

"My dear child, I was so busy that I never heard the cab stop. Mr. Spence is coming to audit the school accounts to-morrow, and I am so terribly behind-hand. I am afraid you have had a hot, dusty journey; you looked fagged. I will tell Rhoda to give you some tea."

"She is getting some; please don't trouble, Rosie, dear. If Hillis is in the study I will have it there, and then you can go on with your business." And then she looked at her sister-in-law rather scrutinisingly. "You are working too hard—I can see that plainly—you are dreadfully thin."

But Mrs. Lloyd only smiled, as though her looks were a matter of indifference to her.

"I don't work nearly so much as Hillis does. We both agree that it is better to wear out than rust out—*Laborare est orare*—that is Hillis's motto,"

MRS. LLOYD ROSE WITH AN EXCLAMATION OF SURPRISE.
[*Page* 10.

and she looked at her papers with a sigh, and took them up; the action was significant but involuntary, and a shade crossed Eden's face. She knew Rosamond's greeting would be after this fashion, but, all the same, it chilled her.

Mrs. Lloyd was a tall, fair woman; in her youth she had been beautiful, but the extreme tension at which she lived, the anxieties, conflicting duties, and hard work, that filled up her daily life, with only the slightest possible margin for rest and enjoyment, had made her old before her time. It was a striking face still, but it was worn and thin, and the auburn hair that had once been so glossy was now colourless and mixed with grey; the eyes, which were rather deeply sunk in their sockets, were almost feverish in their brightness; the low, broad forehead was full of intellect and power. It was a grand face, in spite of the sharp lines, but hardly a womanly one.

"I will not interrupt you any more, Rosamond. I will go and have a chat with Hillis. I suppose I am to have my old room?"

"Yes, dear! Ella was getting it ready this morning. She and Maisie are at their work-meeting this afternoon; you know there is to be

a grand bazaar next month, to clear the debt off the school, so, of course, the girls are dreadfully busy."

Eden looked surprised.

"I thought Hillis disapproved of bazaars; he has told me so more than once."

"To be sure he does, and so do I. We have set our faces dead against them all these years; but Lady Mary is too much for us—she and the Ladies' Committee have carried it," and Mrs. Lloyd's lip curled rather disdainfully. "You see, Eden, St. John's is in Lady Mary Field's gift, and of course Hillis feels he owes a good deal to her; thanks to her, we are at least sure of our daily bread, and have a good roof to cover us."

"I see it is a difficult question;" but Eden carefully reserved her opinion. She did not like to say that her brother had been weak to give way to Lady Mary. She knew Rosamond never contradicted her husband; she was singularly loyal in her wifely relations, and Hillis's will was hers. They were a strange couple, but they suited each other perfectly. They were an uncomfortable pair, as Lady Mary once said in her sarcastic way; neither of them cared for personal comfort.

Plain living and high thinking were their rule of life.

Rosamond had left a luxurious home to marry a poor curate, but she had never for an instant regretted it. Even in her brilliant youth her ideals had been higher than most girls, and her complex personality had craved for wider horizons and a fuller and deeper life.

For some years they had led a struggling existence; an increasing family and a dwindling income made it difficult to keep their heads above water. But Rosamond never lost courage. Then circumstances brightened. Lady Mary Field took a fancy to the hard-working, zealous curate, and offered him the living of St. John's, Kensington; and Hillis and Rosamond, with much relief, took possession of the roomy vicarage. Their money troubles were over, but there was no cessation of work. The parish was a large one, but Hillis had an excellent curate to help him, so in an evil hour he took up his old work again—an ecclesiastical history that he had begun in his Oxford days. He was a clever man—a scholar to his fingers' ends; but this history threatened before long to be a sort of Juggernaut to the family;

it spoilt and impoverished the daily life at the vicarage. The head of the house grew every day more engrossed with his work, and, worst of all, Rosamond, whose tastes were intellectual, became engrossed too. Hillis did not neglect his clerical work, but he gradually left most of the visiting to his curate; and his study, and the half-finished history, became the centre of his interests. Rosamond's strong character had one flaw in it—she was jealous of anything that divided her from her husband. In her passionate love, she craved to be all in all to him. It was this wifely devotion that in time superseded her maternal duties; in order to help Hillis in his work, whatever it might be, she was content to leave her children.

When Eden announced her intention of going to the study, Rosamond made no attempt to detain her. Before the door had closed the pen was in her hand again. Any other hostess, however occupied, would have attended to her guests' comfort; but it was only Rosamond's way, thought the girl, with rather a sad smile.

As Eden tapped at the study door, a singularly melodious voice bade her enter. At the sound

Eden's heart beat a little more quickly. Hillis was her only brother. He and his children were her sole kith and kin.

A tall man, at a standing-desk, turned quickly round at her entrance. "Why, Eden, my dear," he said, in a surprised tone, "I thought you were not expected for another hour." Then he kissed her with much affection, and drew up an easy-chair.

"Sit down a moment, while I finish this note, and then I will talk to you. Business first and pleasure afterwards—eh, Edie?"

Eden smiled assent; she was quite content to sit and watch Hillis at his work.

People always said that the Rev. Hillis Lloyd was a handsome man, but his face was not without its defects. His forehead was high, but narrow, and a slight baldness added to its height. He wore glasses, and the long chin and thin lips rather spoiled the contour of the face. His figure was good, and his beautiful voice was a great charm.

Rhoda brought in the tea, and Eden felt greatly refreshed by it. When a quarter of an hour had passed, she moved a little restlessly in her chair.

Hillis laughed apologetically at the sound, and looked at his watch.

"My dear child, I had no idea that it was so late. I shall have to be off directly to a committee meeting. We must have our talk later on; there is so much I want to hear about poor Aunt Anne. I confess"—taking up his position on the rug as he spoke—"I was terribly disappointed about that annuity. I so hoped she would have provided for you."

"She did all she could for me," returned Eden sorrowfully. "Fifty pounds a year is not so bad, after all, Hillis."

"No; but it will not keep you," with a touch of impatience. "Well, it is no good talking to a wilful young woman. Directly Rosamond heard how things were left, she said at once that you must make your home with us."

"Yes, dear, you were both very kind; but you have responsibilities enough on your shoulders. Was it likely that I should saddle myself on you, like an old man of the mountains? No, no, Hillis! I have some sort of conscience!"

"I know your obstinacy of old, Eden," he returned drily; "so I shall not attempt to shake

your resolution: besides, you have made your plans. You prefer to eat the bread of strangers. Very well, you must do so."

"You mean I prefer honest independence to living on my brother. My dear Hillis, you are rather severe on me. Don't you think a strong, strapping young woman, with good health and plenty of energy, ought to be able to get her own living, instead of burdening her relations. Even dear Aunt Anne agreed with me there."

But her brother shook his head.

"It is just a freak of womanish pride. There is plenty of room for you here; and besides that, you could easily have repaid your maintenance by helping Rosamond—— But there, what is the good of talking, when things are settled? And you are going to Huntsmoor? I could not quite understand your letter. You are not to live in the same house as your pupil. Surely that is rather a curious arrangement!"

"Perhaps it is somewhat unusual; but, as my informant, Mrs. Meredith, explained to me, Mr. Redford is rather a recluse, and somewhat odd in his ways, and he has absolutely refused to have a resident governess at Heatherwood. There is a

sort of lodge in the wood—it is called the Log Hut—and an old servant and her husband live there. I am to occupy two rooms, and Mrs. Russell is to board me. I do not know if the Squire is a woman-hater; but it is expressly stated that I am to partake of no meal at Heatherwood unless by special invitation."

"I never heard of anything so absurd in my life," observed Hillis testily. "Why, the man must be a lunatic."

"No, he is only eccentric; Mrs. Meredith says he is a rough diamond. Do you know, Hillis, I consider the arrangement charming. I have always dreaded the idea of being a resident governess. It will be so delightful to be free and have my evenings to myself."

"I advise you not to be too sanguine, my dear. You are rather a sociable person; and a cottage in a wood, however delightful in summer, is hardly a desirable abode in winter. I confess the very idea makes me shiver. Well, when you have tired of your pet scheme, perhaps you may feel more disposed to close with my offer. Let me see. You go in a week—this is July. I will give you to the end of November. Now I must

attend my meeting. I shall not see you again until supper-time." Then he gathered up his papers, and smiled and nodded, and the next moment Eden was alone.

"Poor Hillis," she sighed, "he means kindly. I am afraid he is really hurt at my determination, but I know I am right. This could never be home to me: their ways are not my ways; there would be neither comfort nor freedom, and I hate any sort of friction. Rosamond would do her best for me, but it would never answer; she and Hillis are all in all to each other, and there would be no place for his sister. Thank Heaven I have outlived jealousy long ago; but I am old enough to be reasonable and see things in their true light, and as long as I can work I will not be a drag on Hillis. Now I will go upstairs and see poor little Ivy." And then Eden bravely stifled another sigh, and rose from her seat.

CHAPTER II

IVY

"Common sense is as rare as genius."
EMERSON.

THE nursery, as it was called, was a large, cheerful room at the top of the house, overlooking the vicarage garden. As Eden crossed the uncarpeted passage, a sharp little voice called out, "Oh, dear Aunt Eden, is that really you?"

"Why, yes, my girlie, here I am, as large as life and twice as natural, as they say in the wax-works. And how is your own dear self?" and Eden stooped lovingly over the big couch where the little invalid spent her weary days, while two thin arms held her closely.

"Oh, I shall be better now you have come," whispered Ivy, with another strangling hug. "Oh! do take off your hat, Auntie, and sit where I can see you;" and then Eden smilingly drew up a low, cushioned chair beside her.

"You must not keep me too long, dear child, for I must unpack, and make myself tidy by supper-time; but we will have a nice little talk first. You know I have come for a week, so we shall have plenty of time together." And Ivy gave a satisfied nod.

When a mere baby, Ivy had met with a severe accident; a careless nurse had left the perambulator too near an open gate leading to an area, a lad passing had given it a playful push, and the poor child had been flung down the steep flight of stone steps.

Spinal injury had been the result, and for seven years the little sufferer had not left her couch; her growth had been stunted, and no one would have guessed that she was more than eight, though in reality she was in her thirteenth year. She had been a lovely infant, the flower of the flock, but constant pain and nervous irritability had sharpened the little white face until it looked weird and old; the brilliant eyes seemed preternaturally large, and the deep shadows under them gave them a pathetic expression; it was only when she smiled that Ivy looked like a child.

A grave, pitiful look came into Eden's eyes as

she watched her. "I am afraid it has been one of your bad days, darling," she said gently, as she passed her hand caressingly over the rings of auburn hair that lay on the child's forehead. Ivy's hair had been her chief beauty, but a year or two before the doctor had advised her mother to cut it short. Eden, who was then staying at the Vicarage, had pleaded piteously that this order might not be carried out, but Rosamond had been inexorable; but even she seemed touched when her sister-in-law fairly sobbed over the heap of golden tresses in her lap. "My poor little shorn lamb," she said, a little regretfully; "but you are more comfortable now, are you not, Ivy?"

"Oh yes, I was so hot with all that hair, mother," returned the child contentedly; "but shorn lambs are so ugly, mammie."

"Has your poor back been worse than usual?" asked Eden tenderly, after a moment's silence.

"Yes—no—oh, I hardly know; but it has been one of my wicked days, that is what I always call them. This morning I was so cross with Rhoda while she was dressing me; but then, she hurt me so. And I said horrid things to Ella and Maisie. Oh, Aunt Eden, it is so dreadful

to feel crosser and crosser every minute. When mother came to give me my lessons I cried over them, and then she looked displeased and went away, and I have been alone all this afternoon, and so miserable."

Eden did not smile over this childish catalogue to miseries; she knew too well the cause of "these wicked days," when the jarred nerves could not endure a quick step or voice, when every sound only added to her misery.

She knew, also, what a heavy burden the afflicted child was in that over-tasked household, and how unskilful hands and ignorance added to her discomfort.

Rosamond was not without maternal affection, but Nature had not intended her to be a nurse; she was anxious to do her duty to her suffering child, but the atmosphere of a sick-room was strangely repugnant to her: it depressed her to witness pain that she did not know how to relieve; she had no idea of rendering those little womanly services and alleviations which insensibly soothe and lessen it; her treatment was too bracing, and failed in tenderness. Eden's face grew grave as she listened to Ivy's plaintive tale; for the first time

a doubt crossed her mind: Was her decision a wise one, after all? Would she have done better to accept the home that Hillis had offered her, and to have devoted herself to Ivy?

Any kind of doubt was a positive pain to Eden; she was singularly direct and resolute of purpose, and seldom wavered if she had once made up her mind on any subject; she never hurried over a decision, but when once she had resolved to do a thing, no amount of argument had the slightest effect on her: and this firmness often led to an accusation of obstinacy.

Eden grew a little silent as Ivy poured out a medley of childish thoughts and feelings—she was revolving the situation for the hundredth time; but before many minutes were over her clear head and strong common sense had arrived at the old decision: yes, she had certainly done right in refusing her brother's offer.

True, her presence at the vicarage would add largely to Ivy's happiness—the child doated on her aunt, and was always at her best with her; but in devoting herself to the invalid she would be usurping the mother's and sisters' place, and encouraging them in their self-imposed duties.

Eden's womanly and affectionate nature yearned over the child, but nevertheless her good sense told her that Rosamond's sphere of duty lay here, and not in her husband's study. "Rosamond is only human," she said to herself: "before long she would wake up to the fact that I had usurped her prerogative, and that she had grown less to Ivy, and then the friction would begin. I do not hold with doing other people's work," she went on; "'bearing one another's burdens' was never intended to promote indolence. I know dear Aunt Anne used to tell me that Rosamond had mistaken her vocation, and I certainly agreed with her." And here Eden roused from her abstraction. "I am poor company, darling," she said gently; "I think I am tired and stupid from my journey—— What were you saying about a cottage, Ivy?"

"Oh, it was only one of my old make-believes," returned the child, with another of her pathetic lovely smiles. "It is not wrong, is it, Aunt Eden? and it helps to pass the time. To-day I was wishing mother had not so much to do; she is always so dreadfully tired when she sits with me, and I don't believe she hears half I say; so I could not help thinking how nice it would be if father gave

up St. John's, and we could go and live in a little cottage in the country, and then mother would have no poor people and classes, and she could be always with me. Ah, how nice that would be!" in a tone of rapture; for Ivy's love for her mother was as touching as it was beautiful.

"But how about father's book? You have forgotten that, dear."

"Oh, that shall be quite finished," returned the child seriously. "Oh no, Auntie, we would not have that horrid book in our cottage, it would spoil everything. Mother would have time to write all her letters comfortably, and then she would read to me. There would be a little lawn, and flower-beds, and a verandah, where my couch would be; and I could watch the butterflies and bees, and all the baby clouds in the sky, and it would be just lovely!" and here Ivy's blue eyes were wide with excitement. "Oh, there are Ella and Maisie. Oh, please don't say anything about my make-believes, Auntie; Ella always says it is so wrong to imagine things, and Maisie just laughs at me."

Eden nodded reassuringly; then she greeted her nieces affectionately. Ella, who was just seventeen,

strongly resembled her mother; she was a tall, fair girl, with an interesting face, but she looked pale and delicate, and there was a weary droop of the figure that spoke volumes. Maisie, who was only a year younger, was a round-faced girl, and looked far more robust. "I am so sorry that I could not stay at home to receive you," began Ella hurriedly and apologetically: "it was not my fault, was it, Maisie?"

Then her sister shook her head decidedly. "It was not Ella's fault one bit, Aunt Eden; she asked mother to let her give up the work-meeting and stay at home, but mother looked quite shocked. She said duty came before pleasure, and that you would understand that an engagement must be kept."

"Oh, never mind all that, May," returned Ella wearily. "Aunt Eden, can I help you unpack?" But though Eden did not refuse this offer, she took care that Ella's share of labour should be as light as possible, and her cheerful talk and breezy ways were as good as a tonic to the tired girl. The evening passed much as usual: the committee-meeting was a long one, the supper was late; directly the meal was over, Rosamond went

back to her accounts, and Ella retired to the nursery to read Ivy to sleep. On her previous visit Eden had remonstrated strongly against this pernicious habit; it was bad for Ivy, she said, and trying for Ella, as it deprived her of the evening's recreation; but she could never make Rosamond see it. The poor child was sadly mismanaged: she was nursed in the most casual way; her mother and sisters and Rhoda waited on her by turns, but there was no method, no one was in special charge of the invalid. Ella and Maisie slept in the adjoining room; there was a door of communication, and Ella was often roused from sleep to soothe the child's nervous fears. The night was Ivy's worst time; she slept fitfully, and the shadowy corners of her room held nameless terrors for her, which she was ashamed to confess. Childhood is seldom free from these goblin fears; to it the dark is always full of mystery—a veritable reign of terror. The guttering night-light only seemed to Ivy to accentuate and deepen those creeping shadows; she would repeat her prayers over again, and try and think of the beneficent and invisible guardian angel; the poor child would lie quaking, yet making heroic efforts to endure silently, so as

not to disturb Ella, until the need of a human presence was too great to be restrained.

"How can you be so foolish and tiresome, Ivy?" Ella would say, as she groped her way sleepily to her sister's bed. But she was a kind-hearted girl, and she never failed to turn the hot pillow and straighten the bedclothes; and she would even sit holding Ivy's hand in a comfortable way, until she was soothed and quieted.

"I wish one could see one's guardian angel," Ivy once said; "one would never be afraid afterwards." But Ella had no answer ready; she had had the same wish often and often in her childish days; even now her cheek flushed in the darkness as she remembered once sitting up in her little crib and opening her childish arms wide. "Oh, dear angel, do let me see you just once, only once, and I will love you so." But there was no radiant figure limned against the darkness, no white, plumy wings responding to the desolate baby-cry.

Eden spent the evening quietly in her brother's study, and they had their long-deferred talk. Hillis, who had not been able to leave his parish, was anxious to hear about his aunt's death-bed.

They had lost their parents in early youth, and their father's sister had given them a home. Their education and Hillis's college expenses were paid out of the small capital that was left for the purpose; latterly Eden had been wholly dependent on her aunt. Her life at Lavender Cottage had been tranquil and happy, though it had been deprived of much gaiety or change; but her contented nature had made few demands. She wished sometimes that Hillis was more with her; but the gentle little spinster, with her methodical ways and small feminine rules and precepts, was hardly attractive to the young man. "I always feel so out of it," he would say to his sister. "I am very fond of Aunt Anne—she is a good old sort; but she somehow rubs me up the wrong way; she thinks more of the minor morals than of all the Ten Commandments. Oh, you need not look so shocked, Edie; of course, I am speaking figuratively. Aunt Anne's array of side-laws and patched-up precepts are positively alarming." But Eden, who was a womanly woman, found nothing restrictive or harassing in the mild code that prevailed at Lavender Cottage. She knew that underneath the little oddities and old-

maidish ways there beat the tenderest and most innocent heart.

Hillis owned it, too, as he listened to the account of that peaceful death-bed. "She did not forget you, Hillis," observed Eden softly; "she spoke of you almost at the last. 'Tell him not to work too hard, and give him my dear love;' and then she spoke of Ivy. 'She was always so sorry for the child.' Well, that chapter of my life is closed, and I am to turn a new page." And then Rosamond joined them, looking white-lipped and heavy-eyed with fatigue, and shortly afterwards Eden retired to her room.

The week passed somewhat slowly. Every night Eden took herself severely to task for feeling relieved that another day was over.

The atmosphere of St. John's Vicarage was more trying than usual. She missed her aunt keenly, but this fact seemed almost to surprise Hillis and Rosamond; certainly they expressed little sympathy. It was their habit to grieve silently over any trouble; but though Eden was fully aware of their undemonstrative ways, she felt chilled and depressed. They never seemed to grasp the fact that she was sad and lonely, or

that she missed the peaceful home she had lost.

Then other things troubled her. It pained her to see how heavily the mother's strong, untiring energy, and power of work, pressed on the girls, especially on Ella. They had absolutely no time for amusement or self-improvement. At seventeen Ella had finished her education, and had been launched on a sea of parish duties. She had a district, helped Rosamond with mothers' meetings and work-meetings, taught in the Sunday-school and night-school, and all her leisure was devoted to Ivy. Any lassitude or girlish distaste for the ceaseless grind was treated by Rosamond as indolence, or a weak giving way to fancies.

"Never think of your own feelings or inclination when you have work to do," she would say, in her stoical way. Eden once told her that she would have made a capital Spartan mother, or an excellent Egyptian taskmaster; but Rosamond, who was somewhat dense, took it all in good part.

"I should hate to see my girls idle," she returned. "Ella is really very good and willing, but she has her fads sometimes. Of course, she

is not as strong as Maisie, so I never let her sit up late, even if I want her help ever so much."

In her own mind Rosamond thought she was a model mother, and that she brought up her girls to be useful members of society; and, as her influence was all-powerful in the house, Ella submitted dutifully to what some up-to-date girls would have called legalised tyranny. But, alas! both body and mind suffered.

CHAPTER III

ROBIN HOOD AND A WOOD-CUTTER

"At random looking over the brown earth
Thro' that green glooming twilight of the grove,
It seemed to Pelleas that the fern without
Burnt as a living fire of emeralds."

LORD TENNYSON.

GOOD-BYES are never pleasant, and when, on the appointed day, Eden drove away from St. John's Vicarage, she felt far from cheerful.

Ivy's heart-broken sobs were still in her ears, and she could hear the sharp, childish voice saying over and over again, "Oh, dear Aunt Edie, if you could only stop here always, how happy Ella and I would be!" And Ella's sad, wistful eyes had fully endorsed this.

Eden had not seen Cecil and Owen, as they were still at school, but she soon perceived that the near approach of the vacation was not a source of unmixed pleasure to Rosamond.

"They are dear, good lads," she had observed

one day, "and their master gives them excellent reports. I really think Cecil takes after his father in his love for history and classics. But they are so terribly noisy. Hillis declares he can do no work while they are in the house, and they excite Ivy and tire her to death;" and Rosamond sighed as though her goodly boys were heavy responsibilities; but Eden only smiled in reply.

She was very proud of her nephews; they were both bright, intelligent lads, and she knew that Ivy was secretly counting the days until her brothers' return. Owen was her special crony, and he spent a great deal of his time in the nursery, playing games, or reading to her out of his favourite books of adventure.

It was an intensely hot day; the blue, cloudless sky was almost Italian in its clearness; a hot, dry wind brought eddies of dust to the street corners; there was something thirsty and expectant in the ripple of the leaves; trees murmured, flowers drooped, and even the sparrows, those roystering freebooters of the London streets, sat listless, with puffed-up feathers, on the Park palings instead of picking up corn between the horses' feet.

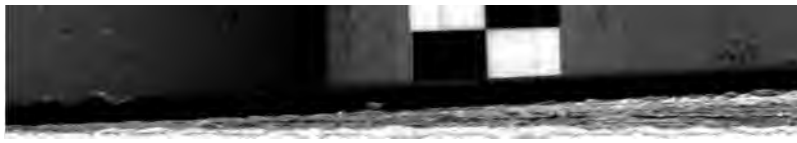
Happily the journey was a short one, and

Elsenham was reached in an hour and a half. Eden knew that no one would be likely to meet her, and she was just on the point of telling the porter to order a fly when she saw a lady in a pony-carriage beckoning to her rather eagerly. Eden went towards her at once; she was a dark, sallow little woman, and she had very bright, keen eyes, that seemed to see everything in a moment; she was flecking a drowsy fly off the pony's broad grey back; then she sat very erect, and gave Eden a good-natured nod.

"You are Miss Lloyd, are you not?" she observed, in a friendly tone, "and you are going to Heatherwood." Her voice was a little sharp and abrupt, but it was distinctly cultured. Then, as Eden bowed assent, she continued, "My name is Ferard; my husband is Vicar of Hencotes—that is a village near Huntsmoor."

Eden looked at her in silent perplexity. It was evident that the situation puzzled her; she had never heard of either Mrs. Ferard or Hencotes.

"So you see it is all right," continued her new friend briskly. "I met the Squire in the village, and I told him I would drive you up if you did not mind my parcels. I have been doing my



chores, as they say in Lancashire. Jump in, please, and George will take up your luggage in the cart. There he is," pointing with her whip to a tall, red-haired man, in colloquy with the porter.

"Do you mean Mr. Russell, who lives at the Log Hut?" asked Eden. "Will you let me speak to him for a moment, please? I see there is a bag missing. I will not keep you long."

"The bag is here, miss," observed the porter. "George will bring them along all right." Then the tall man touched his hat silently, and Eden returned to the pony-carriage.

"It is really very kind of you," she said, as they drove away from the station. "I was just going to take a fly."

"Yes, and I stopped you in time," returned Mrs. Ferard. "In the country one must do neighbourly things. Now, Robin"—apostrophising the fat pony reproachfully—"surely you don't expect me to walk up that hill? Mole-hills are not in the bond." Then she gave a fresh little laugh, and tickled him playfully under the left ear. "Go on, you are a humbug, Robin. I will not budge till we come to the steep part. Robin Hood is

dreadfully spoilt," she went on; "he makes me walk up all the hills; if I refuse he puts on the airs of a martyr, and hangs his head as though he were dead beat."

"He looks very strong," observed Eden; and indeed, Robin Hood looked the sturdiest and sleekest of ponies. "Dear me, I had no idea the country was so hilly; I have never been to Huntsmoor."

"It is a three-miles climb," returned Mrs. Ferard calmly. "There, you see, Robin has come to a full stop; that means that we are to get out, and look sharp about it. I am afraid the walk will tire you, Miss Lloyd." But Eden disclaimed all idea of fatigue; the winding road was full of beauty, and there was sufficient shade most of the way to make it pleasant for pedestrians. Mrs. Ferard took the reins over her arm—she seemed very active and full of life—and Eden found it difficult to keep pace with her nimble tread.

"So you are going to Heatherwood," she observed presently, and her eyes twinkled with amusement. "You are a courageous young woman, Miss Lloyd, to beard the lion in his den; what shall you do if he roars too loudly?" Then she

broke into a peal of merry laughter as she saw Eden's perplexed face.

"You do not grasp the situation, do you? I have a great respect for the Squire, and Augustine —Augustine is my husband—thinks no end of him, but I am afraid the Huntsmoor folk fancy he is a little touched." Here she tapped her forehead meaningly. "A bee in the bonnet, a bit daft, don't you know. But that is all moonshine and rubbish; he is a little eccentric and odd in his ways, but his wits are as keen as most people's. He is rather a recluse in his habits; that sort of thing grows on one."

"And his niece, Miss Redford? I am anxious to get a report of my new pupil!"

"Oh, I am very fond of Bonnie; but she is crude, excessively crude. But how can you expect anything else?" (in an argumentative tone). "I put it to you, Miss Lloyd: could any girl have grown up under greater disadvantages? For years she has run wild; she has never known a lady's refining influence since her aunt died. Mr. Redford's housekeeper, Mrs. Pern, is a good creature, conscientious and sensible; but she is only a servant."

Eden began to feel alarmed. She was fully prepared to find a backward pupil, but Mrs. Ferard's speech hinted at a lamentable want of culture. When Mr. Redford wrote to her he had explained that he only needed the services of a lady to teach his niece English literature, French, and music, as he took Latin and elementary mathematics himself; and Eden, who had finished her education at a first-class school in Paris, and had been taught music and singing by the best masters, had felt herself quite competent to direct the education of a girl of fifteen.

"I am afraid Miss Redford is rather undisciplined," she said, in an embarrassed voice. Eden felt vaguely alarmed at the idea, for her well-ordered existence at Lavender Cottage had not fitted her to deal with "hoydens." "I suppose Bonnie is only a pet name?"

"Most people call her Bonnie," returned Mrs. Ferard. "She was christened Bonnabel, but it is too big and grown-up to suit her. Ah well, I must not prejudice you, Miss Lloyd. I must let you form your own opinions; both Bonnie and Mr. Redford are originals. I will let you into a little secret. You have to thank me for bringing

you to Huntsmoor. Mr. Redford would never have thought of engaging a governess for Bonnie if I had not put the idea in his head; indeed, I dictated the letter you received from him. There, we can get in now. I will just give Robin his lump of sugar, and then we will drive on."

Eden certainly liked her companion; she was a great talker, and evidently as sharp as a needle, but she seemed a very genuine little person. Her next speech was decidedly friendly. "I mean to pay an early visit to the Log Hut. I shall be curious to know how you like being buried alive. Susan Russell is a great friend of mine. I like George, too, though he is a bit of a dummy."

"I shall be delighted to have a visitor," returned Eden, with a pleased smile. She was glad to think that this sociable and loquacious little woman would be her neighbour. "I hope the vicarage is quite near."

"My dear creature," with an amused laugh, "I grieve to tell you that Hencotes does not boast of a vicarage except in imagination. We live in a scrubby little place called 'The Retreat.' Our only church is a Tin tabernacle where we say our prayers, and freeze in winter and frizzle in summer:

but I rejoice to add that we have already begun to build the new church ; as the walls are only a foot high, I expect we shall summer it and winter it in the Tin tabernacle."

"But you are near?" persisted Eden, who wanted to be sure of this fact.

"Yes, oh yes! Only a mile away; most of the Huntsmoor people come to Hencotes—they like my husband's preaching. Now here we are," as they came in sight of a white gate, flanked by larches and rowans. "Heatherwood is a quarter of a mile on, but this is the short cut to the Log Hut. You must go down that broad path until you come to a blasted oak ; then you must take the little winding path to the left, and you will find the Hut all right. They ought to have called it the Hermitage ; it would suit some Weary-of-the-World perfectly."

Then she shook hands cordially with Eden ; but the next moment there was a mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

"*Au revoir*, Miss Lloyd, 'don't tine heart'—as Carlyle's old mother used to say—the lion's teeth are drawn, and no one cares for his roar. Good-bye, and give my love to my Lady Frivol."

"Now what on earth does she mean by all that?" Eden asked herself in some perplexity. "Originals grow thick in Huntsmoor, seemingly." Then she left the riddle, and gave herself up to observation. The broad woodland path down which she was walking was bordered by fir-trees. On one side was a fir-wood, with long, slanting avenues, losing themselves in the distance; the still solemnity of those stately aisles, the mystical green light that seemed to pervade them, alternating with wonderful arrows of golden sunshine, gave them a magical charm. Surely Sir Galahad, in his quest for the Holy Grail, must have ridden through just such a wood; and Una and her faithful lion must have wandered through some such shady glade! On the other side the woodland was more broken; there was a carpet of purple heather, over which the bees were humming; here there were bracken and furze and tangled hedges of holly and bramble blossoms mixed with low bushes of bilberries; and across this stretch of moorland a soft, sweet wind was blowing, laden with fragrant odours. It was a wilderness, and yet it was Nature's garden; and the glorious contrast between the regal purple of

the heather and the blue-green distances of the fir-wood would have enchanted an artist's eye.

The blasted oak was soon visible; it had been evidently scathed by lightning, and had been left to serve as a landmark. The little path that Mrs. Ferard had mentioned led straight through the wood and was strewn by fir-cones; but it soon came to an end, and she found herself at the back of the cottage. Here there was a shed, a wood-pile and a pigstye, a covered well and a small vegetable garden, with a row of curious-looking beehives. The kitchen door was open, and as Eden paused a moment she saw a buxom-looking woman in a white sun-bonnet come clattering over the red-brick floor with a wooden pail, on her way to the well.

On a low bench a man was sitting, chopping wood. Eden could not see his face, but it was certainly not George Russell.

He had an old brown velveteen coat and gaiters—like a keeper—and closely-cropped grey hair, and he was humming vigorously over his work. By-and-bye he broke into a low, crooning song, in rather a pleasant voice:

"There was a jolly miller once
Lived on the river Dee;
He worked and sang from morn till night—
No lark more blithe than he."

The flying chips seemed to keep time to the song. Then the man tossed away his old deer-stalker cap, and his hair shone like grey velvet in the sunshine. Presently he began crooning again:

"And this the burden of his song
For ever used to be:
'I care for nobody—no, not I,
If nobody cares for me!'"

The woman came clattering noisily back over the stone flags, and her over-full pail left a wet trail across the little yard; her sun-bonnet was tilted back, showing a freckled, good-humoured face.

"Deary me, master, hasn't Miss Bonnie learnt you a new song yet—I am mortal tired of the 'Old Miller.' It seems to me," and here she put her hands on her hips, after the fashion of market-women, "that it is hardly human-like or Christian not to care for folk, whether they care for us or no."

"There I differ from you, my good Susan;" and the crooning began again:

"Tender-handed stroke a nettle,
And it stings you for your pains;
Grasp it like a man of mettle,
And it soft as silk remains."

"Now, to hear the likes of that!" observed the woman, in admiring accents. But the wood-cutter waved his hand deprecatingly:

"'Tis the same with common natures—
Use 'em kindly, they rebel;
But be rough as nutmeg-graters,
And the rogues obey you well."

"There, lass, I will just finish chopping up the remainder of the wood, and then you can tell my Lady Frivol that we will just make tracks before the young woman arrives."

CHAPTER IV

"MY LADY FRIVOL"

"A light heart lives long."—*Love's Labour's Lost.*

EDEN had been an amused auditor until the last sentence made her start and hurry on. She was thankful that the blackberry-bushes screened her. A sudden light had dawned on her. The wood-cutter, in the shabby velveteen and gaiters, was no other than the Squire himself; and Eden bit her lip and frowned slightly as she recalled the acrid tone with which he pronounced the words "young woman."

"My Lady Frivol!" Could this be a sobriquet for Bonnie? Then she stopped short, with a murmur of surprised admiration at the charming picture before her.

The Log Hut was a perfect *beau-idéal* of a cottage; the deep rustic porch was smothered in honey-suckle and banksia roses, which peeped in at the low lattice windows.

A broad space had been cleared before the cottage, which was encircled by fir-woods; a wild garden of heather and bracken extended to the very porch, and a little footpath had been worn before the door by constant footsteps. Bees were humming amongst the heather, and white, flower-like butterflies were skimming through the perfumed air; on the roofs, and amongst the turreted chimneys of the cottage, pigeons and doves were preening themselves. In the porch two great black poodles sat solemnly side by side; one of them barked furiously as Eden approached, but at that moment some unseen person began to play a lively tarantella on the piano; then both the poodles stretched themselves and stalked slowly into the house.

Eden followed them, and knocked gently, but no one took any notice; so she slipped into the airy passage and peeped into the parlour. A girl in a tumbled blue cotton, with a deer-stalker set rather rakishly on her head, was sitting with her back to the door, and strumming vigorously on a pretty black-and-gold pianette, and the banging of the notes, and the uneven and scurrying execution, were terrible to hear; and yet there

THE MUSIC ENDED WITH A CRASH.

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was a spirit and fire in the little performance that astonished Eden. Evidently the girl's whole soul was in the music—it was so rollicking and jovial, so sprightly and hilarious ; and as she played on in this jaunty fashion, her short red hair seemed to shine out like a halo, under her grey deer-stalker. And then a most surprising thing happened ; for, as the music waxed louder and louder, suddenly one of the poodles walked gravely into the middle of the room, and, with great deliberation, turned a somersault. He had an amber cockade over one ear, which gave him a waggish look. Then he stood upright on his hind legs, while the other poodle, also adorned with a rose-coloured satin bow, went through the same performance. It was a most ridiculous exhibition : the creatures' funereal solemnity, the regularity and order with which they performed their parts, the grim watchfulness of each animal, as though he were criticising the manner in which his companion turned his somersault,—it was so absurd and yet so clever that Eden clapped her hands and cried "Bravo, dogs!" and that brought them to an abrupt standstill.

The music ended with a crash ; both the poodles

stood up on their hind legs and whined in concert, and the girl twirled round rapidly on her stool and stared at the interloper.

"Oh! you have come, have you?" she said coolly, "that's one to me, and Uncle Alick has lost his bet. He says women never are in time for anything—that they always lose their train; and I declared he was just wrong. That will do, Pomp; no more heads over heels, Vanity." Then, with a roguish look, she chanted, in a thin, girlish voice:

"'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly,
'It's the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy.'"

Then suddenly dropping into prose again: "We don't charge for chairs in this 'ere establishment."

What an amazing young person! Certainly My Lady Frivol was an admirable sobriquet. Eden with difficulty kept her countenance; but she remembered her *rôle*, and struggled for gravity. "You are my new pupil, Miss Redford," she observed tentatively; then the young lady made a decided grimace.

"I suppose so," she returned, in a pettish voice.

"Uncle Alick let himself be talked over by that cat, Gatty. I mean to serve her out one day; but you need not begin with your Miss Redfords, for my nerves won't stand it. I am plain Bonnie, don't you know?" Then she eyed Eden critically. "You are dreadfully old" (Eden was just five-and-twenty), "but I suppose you have got a Christian name handy, unless you prefer being called Lloyd?"

"My dear child, not for worlds;" and Eden looked, as she felt, decidedly shocked; but Bonnie only smiled grimly.

"Oh, I don't mind, you can have it your own way; you need not be jumpy, we are free-and-easy in these parts: but I admit, after all, Lloyd would sound rather like a parlourmaid or a footman. Shall I call you teacher, as the children do in the Sunday-school?" and here the red-headed minx dropped a rustic curtsy.

"Bonnie, what can make you say such absurd things? My name is Eden, but I certainly do not wish my pupil to call me by that name!" But the audacious Bonnie only clapped her hands delightedly.

"Eden! What a charming name! It is ever

so much prettier than Bonnie. Of course I shall call you by it; it would be wicked, absolutely wicked, to let such a lovely name as that rust for want of use. Do you know what that sneering little cat Gatty Ferard calls me?—'My Lady Frivol!' Isn't she a malicious little toad? But she is right, I am a frivol. Oh, you will have your hands full, Eden; I am a regular hedgehog in lesson-time;" and then she linked her arm through Eden's in a most friendly way. "You ain't handsome, are you, teacher? but I like the look of you, somehow. I expect you are a good old sort, not a common or garden governess."

Eden felt as though her breath were taken away; hoydens were not in it. How would she ever deal with this perverse, audacious, and most eccentric young creature. Eden looked at the small, brown hand that was gripping her own; of course it was not over clean, and Bonnie's crumpled blue cotton was decidedly dirty. "My Lady Frivol" was certainly not pretty, but she had an odd, characteristic sort of face. She had a frank mouth and beautiful white teeth, but her nose was a little pert and aggressive, and unless

she smiled the brown eyes had rather a pathetic expression; but they grew mirthful and mischievous in a moment. There was no doubt that, as Mrs. Ferard told her, the girl had been utterly mismanaged and neglected, and that her own work was cut out for her.

Eden tried to forget her aggravating young hostess for a moment, as she glanced round the snug parlour. The pianette was new; there was a comfortable Ilkley couch by the window, and one or two easy-chairs; some Shirley poppies and grasses were in a tall green glass on the round table, and a great bunch of heather was in the fireplace.

"It is a jolly little place, isn't it?" remarked Bonnie, in a satisfied tone. "I told Uncle Alick it was too nice for the governess. Oh, you need not fly out at me, Eden—I had not seen you then. Now come along and see your sleeping den; it is just lovely! I helped Susan make the bed and hang the curtains, and I have stuck all those pins in the cushion;" and then Eden fairly burst out laughing, for on the white cushion on the toilet-table was traced elaborately with black and white pins, "Welcome, little stranger."

"Oh, I am so glad you can laugh," exclaimed Bonnie; "it makes you look quite, young, don't you know, and heaps nicer." But Eden pretended to frown at this plain speaking.

It was a charming little room; the simple hangings looked so fresh and dainty, and the easy-chair, with its antique frills, was very inviting. Nothing had been forgotten for her comfort—the curtained recess with hooks for her dresses, the big bath, and the shelves for her favourite books. Both the rooms were in the front, and looked over the wild garden to the fir-woods. Later on she found out that the back rooms were used by the Russells.

"Now I shall go and help Mrs. Russell get tea ready, and then I must go back with Uncle Alick," observed Bonnie, tripping to the door.

Even at this early stage of their acquaintance Eden was struck with the girl's easy carriage. She moved with the free grace of an Indian squaw or an Arab, or any other wild and uncivilised or forest-born creature. There was something piquant and unusual in her whole appearance that was singularly attractive. With all her odd

ways and frank impertinences, no one could forget somehow that she was a young lady.

As Eden got rid of the dust, she could hear Bonnie whistling and chattering in the blithest way. By-and-bye little scraps of talk came to her ear which she vainly tried not to hear. "Well, I am glad you are satisfied, Miss Bonnie," in Susan Russell's voice; "for I am bound to say you are hard to please, for you have got such notions in your head as I never did hear."

"Well, she is a bit stiff and antique you know," returned the flippant young voice, "but she is not a worrier or a driver. She is a sort of the Do-as-you-would-be-done-by—you know what I mean, Susan; she is up to fun, only she tries to hide it." Then a man's voice struck into the conversation.

"Now the point is, my Lady Frivol, are you or are you not coming home with me? Patience may be a virtue, young woman, but your humble servant declines to practise it."

"Coming, sir, coming—as the lobster said when he saw the pot; but I regret to say I have got an engagement with my friend Crab—I am just getting teacher's tea ready; she is famished, poor thing! By the bye, Uncle Alick," coaxingly,

"you had better get the introduction over, and then you will sleep better."

"Nonsense, child; don't be a fool! I am going at once, Bonnabel—do you hear me?—at once!"

The speaker was evidently irate.

"Oh, good gracious, Susan! Did you hear that 'Bonnabel'? He might as well have given me a box on the ears. Bless his little heart, he is in a nice temper. I must catch him and give him a great hug, or there will be murder. Coming, old boy! coming!" And the flying footsteps faded in the distance.

"A curious pair," thought Eden. "I expect my position will be about as comfortable as a lodging on Vesuvius." Then she went into the sitting-room, where she found Mrs. Russell covering the tea-table with country delicacies. She still wore her white sun-bonnet tilted over her eyes. When she knew her better, Eden used to wonder if she slept in it, for she wore it morning, noon, and night. She said she was used to it, and that it kept off draughts, as George was so terribly fond of air.

She dropped a little curtsy when she saw her

lodger. "I have made bold to boil two new-laid eggs, ma'am," she said pleasantly, "for Miss Bonnie thought you would be fairly starved after your long journey. I could broil a rasher in a moment, for I have a ham of my own curing, and it is as sweet as sweet can be."

But Eden declined that. "Indeed, it is not necessary, Mrs. Russell; I had a good luncheon at one, and it is only half-past five now: but I shall be glad of a cup of tea."

"Well, there's heather honey; we have grand honey, Miss Lloyd, and these yellow plums are from the Squire's garden, and the butter is from their dairy. Mrs. Pern is a first-rate hand with her butter, and as it is baking-day that loaf is quite new."

"Indeed, Mrs. Russell, I am sure to enjoy my tea."

But her hospitable hostess had not yet finished her preparations. Some lemon marmalade and strawberry jam, and a plate of small, homely-looking cakes, filled up every available space.

It was a novel situation as Eden sat looking out at the purple heather belted round by dark fir-woods: the tranquillity and stillness of the

scene seemed to refresh and soothe her. The little parlour looked home-like already, and the prospect of long, quiet evenings spent with work and books seemed pleasant and attractive. Eden, who was an optimist by nature, refused to imagine the strange solitude and dreariness of a winter's afternoon, with only bare, leafless trees and blackened gorse before her eyes, when no human footstep but her own would crunch among the yellow, dead leaves; there was no need to think of that when there were golden days and silver nights before her, and all the pomp and glory of long autumn months.

Eden would not allow, even to herself, that she could be dull in this perfect place: she could hear the doves cooing from the roof, and every now and then a pigeon fluttered down on the ground; the humming of the great brown bees were distinctly audible, and a little robin was flitting in and out the porch.

When Eden had finished her tea, she unpacked and arranged her books; then she tried the piano, and finally went in search of Mrs. Russell. She and her husband had had their supper, for the frizzling of bacon had filled the cottage with appe-

tising odour. George was working in the little vegetable garden, and Susan was "siding," as she called it, pattering over the brick floor in her clogs. The little kitchen was delightfully cosy; the round table and chairs were polished, and shone in the red firelight; the gleaming brasses and tins over the mantelpiece were as bright as possible; a cat and her kittens lay in an old basket near the hearth; outside in the yard cocks and hens were pecking their evening meal from a big red earthenware pan; some black and white ducks were paddling in a tub of water. Susan's face beamed as she wrung out her clean dish-cloth. "Sit you down, Miss Lloyd, in George's chair; you are as welcome as the flowers in May, for George, bless his heart, is no talker, and I am that dull at times that I am forced to speak to pussie, or I should lose my senses out of sheer dulness, for a still tongue was never natural to me," said Susan. "As mother says, I am a born chatterer, and, poor body, I am bound to confess she is right."

CHAPTER V

"BEARDING THE LION"

"A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate
That flushed her spirit."

LAMB.

EDEN slept sweetly between her lavender-scented sheets that night; once she woke up, to find the moonlight streaming in at the window. The pure white light seemed to transfigure the homely little chamber—the deep stillness that brooded over the woodlands soon hushed her to dreamless repose.

When the cheerful dawn again roused her, she lay tranquilly, listening to the sound of waking life round the cottage, the drowsy twittering of birds under the eaves, the flapping of wings and crowing of cocks from the hen-roost; then the excited quacking of expectant ducks—cribbed, cabined, and confined, and yearning for pastures new—mingled with the cooing of doves.

"There is nothing like the country," thought Eden. "Oh, I am sure I shall be happy here"—for Eden had a cheerful temperament, and sundry shadowy misgivings that had haunted her the previous evening had retired into the background; and as she sat at her solitary breakfast, looking out on the dew-laden heather, she felt that things were well with her: the novelty and freedom of her situation pleased her and made her gravely elated.

The next moment there was a crackling in the hedgerow, then flying footsteps passed the porch, and, before Eden had time to wonder at her early visitor, Bonnie suddenly swung herself up on the window-sill, while the poodles stood on their hind legs, looking at the occupant of the room with solemn curiosity and disfavour.

"The top of the morning to you, Eden," observed the audacious Bonnie; "and how's yourself, as George always says—'how's yourself, Missie?' Doesn't it sound nice and expressive? Slept well?—that's right—you look as fit as possible." And Bonnie grinned in an affable manner and tossed her auburn locks, a little after the manner of a Shetland pony. "I say,

Eden, I wish you would give me a thick slice of bread-and-honey, for I am as hungry as a hunter."

"Have you not had your breakfast, my dear?" asked Eden, rather surprised at this.

"Bless your heart, no!—we never have breakfast until nine. Uncle Alick is out riding; he wanted me to go with him. He says Jan is getting as fat as a pig for want of exercise, so I promised that I would ride over to Elsenham this afternoon. There's a good soul," as Eden gave her the bread-and-honey. "I have been biking to Wildcroft—you should see my bike, Eden; it is a real beauty! Uncle Alick gave it me last birthday."

"Do you prefer your bicycle to your horse, Bonnie?"

"Oh, it is a new toy, don't you know," returned Bonnie. "Jan's a dear, but it is better fun spinning along on one's bike. Pomp and Vanity have had a good swim in the pond at Wildcroft; now they must go home and make their toilets."

Eden privately thought that Bonnie might do the same with advantage. She was still in the

crumpled blue cotton, and her hair was wilder and rougher than ever.

"Do you ride alone, dear?"

Then Bonnie flushed, and looked a little embarrassed. "Not always. I hope you are not an inquisitive person, Eden. There's Gatty Ferard, she is a regular ferret at finding out things. 'Ask me no questions and I will tell you no lies'—that is what I often say to her, and then she threatens to box my ears; she is a regular vixen is Gatty." Then Bonnie frowned and jumped off the window-sill as an extremely clear and melodious whistle sounded from the fir-woods.

"Whatever is that?" asked Eden, a little startled.

"Oh, I daresay it is the milkman—I mean the man who has charge of the cows," returned Bonnie hurriedly. "People are fond of whistling at Huntswood. I whistle splendidly myself. Well, you will come up to our place about ten, Eden? Uncle Alick will have screwed up his courage by then; he is always at his best after his morning ride. Ta-ta—*au revoir*;" and then Bonnie disappeared into the wood, with the poodles racing after her.

"Now why could not the feckless creature have told me which path leads to Heatherwood?" thought Eden. And then she went in search of Mrs. Russell. She found her pegging up wet sheets on the line in the back yard.

"Oh, you are going across to Heatherwood, are you, Miss Lloyd?" she said, taking a peg from between her teeth. "Oh, there's no special path to the big house; just go through the wood, and you'll find it all right; it is not a quarter of a mile from here—not near, George says. So Miss Bonnie's been here? I thought I heard her voice. And that gay young spark was with her, too, for I heard him whistling."

"Oh no; there was no one with Miss Redford," returned Eden, a little firmly. "She said it was the milkman or dairyman."

"Meaning George, Miss Lloyd. Oh no, George was never a whistler. I'll take my oath it was just that idle good-for-nothing Lord Joslyn. They are as thick as thieves, and wander about like two innocent babes in the wood."

"Good gracious, Mrs. Russell—what do you mean?" and Eden looked so scared that Susan was quite amused.

"Oh, it is no harm—none at all, Miss Lloyd; the Squire does not mind it—he says they are nothing but a pair of children. You see, it is just this way: Lord Joslyn has been ill, and they have sent him to stay along with his grandmother; she is Lady Margaret Alison, and she lives at the Dene, that big white house that looks down over the valley. She is blind, poor lady, so it is not likely to be amusing for the poor lad up at the Dene, so he comes down here a good deal."

"And he is only a boy?" asked Eden anxiously.

"Ah, he may be eighteen or nineteen," returned Susan coolly. "He has left Eton, and they do say he is to go to Oxford when he is stronger. He is a cut above our young lady, of course, for he is the youngest son of the Lord Marquis of Desborough; and he is a fine-looking lad, too, only up to a bit of mischief. He and Miss Bonnie are always wrangling and making it up again. He is a shade masterful is Lord Joslyn, and she has not been used to knock under to nobody; and he knows that, and teases her all the more."

"Well, I must not hinder you any more, Mrs. Russell;" and Eden walked away. She had plenty

of food for meditation. Why had Bonnie told her that very unnecessary fib? She had been sure at the time that she was being hoaxed, although she had pretended to believe her. She had evidently not gone alone to Wildcroft. Eden felt the plot was thickening: it was certainly time my Lady Frivol had a *chaperone*.

Eden found that Mrs. Russell had been right in her directions; she was soon at the end of the little wood—the path she had taken brought her out at the back of Heatherwood. It was a large grey house, and looked solid and imposing; and, except for the gravelled drive in front, it was almost wholly surrounded by a wild garden of bracken, gorse, and heather, with little winding footpaths leading in every direction; and, like the Log Hut, it had a wide belt of fir-wood.

Eden had never seen such a garden; it pleased her—it was so novel and out of the common; and she thought it no wonder it was called Heatherwood. As she went round to the front of the house, she passed some picturesque stables. A groom was rubbing down a splendid brown mare, and Bonnie, standing on a horse-block near them,

was watching them ; she had a handful of carrots, and, with her blue dress and ruddy locks, made a splendid bit of colour.

When she caught sight of Eden she slipped off the horse-block in nimble fashion.

"Uncle Alick is not quite ready," she called out ; "come and see Jan. I have given Jock his carrots ; these are for Rob Roy and Lady Fanny, and for my own dear Jan." Then there was a sudden stamping behind them, and in the loose box, where Jan spent luxurious days, there was a frolicsome kicking-up of heels, and then a beautiful little bay head, with soft, dark eyes, protruded itself over the partition. "Isn't he a pretty fellow?" observed Bonnie, flinging her arms round her favourite ; and the gentle creature whinnied, and thrust his nose lovingly amongst the red locks.

"Look here, Eden, I am going to let him out, and he will follow me like a dog all round the place." And indeed, it was a pretty sight to watch the girl, with the graceful animal following her closely, his brown mane floating in the breeze. There was a log of wood lying on the path ; then the spirit of mischief suddenly entered

Bonnie's madcap head, and before Eden could guess her purpose, one little hand had gripped Jan's mane, and Bonnie had swung herself up lightly, and the next minute Jan was cantering merrily over the heather, round the house, and down the drive, the girl keeping her seat in the most fearless manner.

"Oh dear, oh dear, she will be thrown!" exclaimed Eden anxiously.

But the groom only grinned and shook his head. "Jan won't throw her, ma'am—he is used to Miss Bonnie's vagaries; she could ride him for miles bare-backed and without stirrups, and would come to no harm. She used to try it on with Jock, only the master put a stop to it. She is a rare rider is Miss Bonnie."

"Uncle Alick is right, Shelton. Jan is getting far too fat," exclaimed Bonnie breathlessly, as she cantered up to them. "I must give him a good two hours this afternoon. Well, shall we go in, Eden? The old boy is waiting, you know. I saw him putting on his spectacles as I passed the library window. When he interviews ladies he always puts on blue spectacles. He used to do it when Gatty came; but one day she hid his

BONNIE HAD SWUNG HERSELF UP LIGHTLY.

[*Page* 68.

spectacles, and since then he has not dared to try it on."

Eden made no answer. Bonnie's extraordinary statement was swallowed in silence. She was not at all a shy person, but she felt that it would be a relief when this embarrassing interview was over.

The entrance-hall was large and well-proportioned, and a carpeted lobby, hung with pictures, led to the library. Here they found Mr. Redford, seated at an old writing-table heaped with papers. He rose at their entrance and bowed silently to Eden.

He was a tall, massive-looking man, with a plain, weather-beaten face. He was clean-shaved —no beard or moustache hid the finely formed, resolute, and firm lips. In spite of the grey hair and disguising spectacles, he did not look old—not more than forty-five.

"Sit down Eden," observed Bonnie, dragging up a chair. "Uncle Alick, there is no need to stand;" then, as Mr. Redford subsided into his big carved chair, Bonnie coolly perched herself on one arm.

"Hurry up, old man," she said, with a playful

nudge; "Miss Lloyd hasn't the patience of Job."

Then the Squire grew red and cleared his throat. "I hope my good friend Susan makes you comfortable, Miss Lloyd," he began stiffly. "If there is anything you need, I hope you will mention it, either to my niece or to my excellent housekeeper Mrs. Pern, and, if possible, it shall be procured for you."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Redford; but I am perfectly comfortable," returned Eden quietly.

But here Bonnie's brisk little voice interposed. "Susan gave her an awfully good spread this morning, Uncle Alick; Eden won't starve at the Log Hut—Mother Pern will see to that."

"Humph! ah yes, Bonnie, my dear;" a little irritably, as she gave him another nudge, "I should get on better if you would leave off prodding me with your elbow." But Bonnie took no apparent notice of this remark; she only inserted her finger in his button-hole, and said in a loud whisper, "You must tell her about lessons, don't you know."

"Oh, to be sure;" and here Mr. Redford

seemed to grasp the situation. "Miss Lloyd, I am indebted to my good friend, Mrs. Ferard——" ("Little sneak of a cat!" observed Bonnie, *sotto voce*.) "I am greatly indebted to her," continued the Squire, "for pointing out to me that my little girl——" ("Little girl, indeed!" in a snappish voice. "You are a silly old man yourself, Uncle Alick.")

"Dear Bonnie, it is rather a pity to interrupt your uncle so much," remonstrated Eden. Then Bonnie simply glared at her; then she put her fingers in her pretty little ears—they were very pretty, like little pink shells.

"Oh, go on, you two," she said in a loud voice; "you need not expect me to help you any more; you may flounder about and be as nervous as you like, Uncle Alick."

Then Eden, secretly exasperated at this childish behaviour on her pupil's part, took up the tangled thread of their talk. "I am very anxious to know your wishes with regard to Bonnabel's education," she said, with a calmness that made itself felt. "You told me in your letter, Mr. Redford, that you only required me to teach music, French, and general English literature.

Will you kindly inform me what hours will suit you, and how long you wish Bonnabel to study?" Then the poor badgered Squire looked helplessly at Bonnie, and Bonnie remorselessly plugged her ears.

CHAPTER VI

AUNT JANIE'S *BOUDOIR*

"The man who goes alone can start to-day; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off."—THOREAU.

THE situation was becoming decidedly strained. Eden sat patient and silent—she wanted an answer to her question ; but the Squire, perplexed, and with all a man's incompetence to grapple with purely feminine matters, grew exceedingly irritable. In his excitement he took off his spectacles, and his keen blue eyes regarded the troublesome young woman before him with marked displeasure. "You must excuse my answering your question, Miss Lloyd," he returned stiffly ; "it is not at all in my province ; you and Bonnabel must settle it between you. And you will greatly oblige me if you will kindly not refer to me in these trifling matters.

Mrs. Ferard will be your best adviser if you are in any difficulty."

Now it was quite evident that Bonnie had heard every word, for she promptly took her fingers out of her ears.

"Don't you believe his nonsense, Eden," she said lustily. "That little cat Gatty sha'n't have her finger in everybody's pie; she is a regular Meddlesome Mattie, and all the old women in the parish are afraid of her. Now come along, and we will settle things by ourselves; Uncle Alick is far too busy to be bothered. You are terribly busy, aren't you, old man?" and here Bonnie patted the closely cropped grey head in a patronising manner. Finally she blew him a kiss and ran out of the room, leaving Eden to follow at her leisure; then Mr. Redford walked solemnly to the door and bowed her out.

Eden's cheeks were hot; if she had followed her inclinations at that moment she would have walked out of Heatherwood and never set foot in it again. Her position was absurd, impossible! How could any intelligent man —and Mr. Redford looked both clever and intelligent—be so utterly impracticable? How

was she ever to gain control over her pupil? And as for chaperonage! . . . Eden felt her temper rising under this strange treatment. A whole array of bristling difficulties seemed to confront her; but the next moment Bonnie's shrill young voice roused her.

"Come along, Eden, I want to show you my diggings, and then we will have a talk. When Uncle Alick has gone out, I will take you all over the place. This is my room. Ah! I thought you would open your eyes," as Eden paused on the threshold in unfeigned surprise. She had expected to see a regular girl's room, a room that would match Bonnie's rough mane and tumbled cotton; but the finest lady in the land might have been satisfied with such a *boudoir*. It was a large room, with a deep bay window overlooking the wild garden; low white book-cases lined two sides of the room, and cabinets of beautiful old china stood in recesses. A number of musical instruments were at one end—a piano, harp, violin, banjo, and guitar, and a mandoline dressed with streaming ribbons; heaps of bound and unbound music littered the floor; a handsomely carved writing-table, some comfortable chairs and

a big Chesterfield couch comprised the rest of the furniture.

"Isn't it a lovely room?" observed Bonnie proudly; "it used to be poor Aunt Janie's favourite room. All those books and china belonged to her. She used to play the harp so beautifully. Aunt Janie was Uncle Alick's sister, and she took care of me, you know, when I was a queer little mite."

"Is she dead, Bonnie?"

"Yes," returned Bonnie, with unusual gravity; "she died three years ago. She and Uncle Alick were regular chums, and he was awfully cut up when she died. I was fond of her, too. But there, what is the good of raking up old troubles?" and here Bonnie became her reckless self again. "Now for our palaver, Eden. Let us smoke the pipe of peace, and make ourselves comfy."

During the next hour Eden continued, by dint of judicious questioning, to glean some particulars respecting her erratic pupil. She discovered that, during her aunt's lifetime, Bonnie had been well taught and well managed, but that since Miss Redford's death she had run completely wild.

Once a week a music-master came from London,

and gave her violin-lessons, also lessons on the piano; but she seldom practised, and so her progress was not very satisfactory. Once a week, too, she had attended French and dancing classes at Elsenham. The rest of her education had been carried on in a most desultory fashion.

"Uncle Alick used to teach me Latin and Euclid, but I have struck lately," went on Bonnie frankly. "I told him I did not mean to be a learned woman, and that I hated Latin and Euclid. I don't mind reading Shakespeare and Dante with him—it is awful fun sometimes; and then Uncle Alick reads so beautifully: but life is not long enough for all these dull things."

"And what do you mean to let me teach you, Bonnie?" asked Eden, in a resigned voice. "There is just one little remark I should like to make before we go on. I am a conscientious person, and if your uncle is to pay me this handsome salary, I mean to earn it properly. The post of sinecure will not suit me in the least, so unless you can tell me honestly that you mean to work and to benefit by my teaching, I shall just pack up and go back to London." Eden spoke quite calmly and without heat, but she

was evidently in earnest, and Bonnie opened her blue eyes rather widely at this plain speaking.

"Well, of all the disagreeable old things!" she began, in a grumbling voice. "You are a regular fraud, Eden; you are worse than that little spitfire Gatty. To look at you, one would never think that you had a temper. Oh, you are a deep one; there's no coming to the bottom of you. No one said that I would not work," in an injured tone. "Haven't I promised you—I mean, haven't I promised Uncle Alick—that I would study hard?"

"My dear child"—and here Eden's smile was very winning—"I am rejoiced to hear it; now let us go to business." But though both teacher and pupil were really anxious to come to an amicable arrangement, their views on the subject of work were so dissimilar, and Bonnie was so obstinately bent on getting her own way, that, at the end, Eden's patience was almost exhausted, and her victory, such as it was, was a very sorry one. After a long argument, Bonnie had at last agreed that she would work with her governess from ten to one. She would read French and English literature, and Eden was to help her with her music and drawing.

Eden wanted to stipulate for an hour in the afternoon, but Bonnie absolutely refused this. "I always ride or drive or bike after luncheon," she observed rather grandly, "unless I play tennis. Do you bike, Eden? Oh, what a pity!" as Eden shook her head. "Never mind, I will give you lessons, and then we can have some fun together."

But she was much gratified at hearing that Eden was rather fond of tennis. "Come, that's splendid," she said joyfully. "We can get up a four set; one gets so tired of singles. Uncle Alick is a capital player, but he likes golf best, only there are no golf-links nearer than Marsley. Sometimes we have a day's golfing together. Well then, honour bright, Eden, I will be ready for you at ten to-morrow, and I will work as hard as ten little niggers rolled into one."

"Thank you, dear;" and Eden, with much tact and discrimination, said no more on the subject of lessons. Bonnie must be humoured and coaxed, not driven; she saw that plainly. The afternoons must be left to themselves for the present. But there was one thing she must still say. Perhaps it was a little venturesome,

and Bonnie might turn rusty; but all the same, she would say it.

"I am so glad we have settled preliminaries," she observed cheerfully. "Oh, we shall soon understand each other and be good friends. You are truthful by nature, are you not, Bonnie? so I wonder why you told me that little fib about the milkman."

Then Bonnie looked rather ashamed of herself. "How do you know it was a fib?" she retorted. "There, wasn't I right when I said you were a deep one? Why shouldn't I tell a white lie if I like? It does no one any harm. Well, it wasn't exactly true," in a candid tone. "The man who milks the cows is George, and he can't whistle a bit. It was just a playfellow of mine—a nice boy, who is staying just now at the Dene. His name is Lord Joslyn Trevor; he is the youngest son of the Marquis of Desborough, and his grandmother, Lady Margaret Alison, is such an old dear; but she is blind, poor thing."

"And I suppose Lord Joslyn went with you to Wildcroft?" asked Eden mildly; and Bonnie blundered at once into the trap.

"Bless your heart, yes, Joslyn is always turning

up like trumps; he is just a tame cat about the house. Uncle Alick is quite fond of him. He really is a nice boy, only he is a little stuck up at times; he is always talking about his sister, Lady Amabel. He has six brothers and only one sister; she seems a regular prig of a girl, and we are always quarrelling about her. Don't you hate paragons, Eden? I do. I tell Joslyn that, when Lady Amabel comes down to the Dene, I don't mean to call on her; and then he gets regularly savage."

"I don't wonder, Bonnie. How old are you? I think you must be more than fifteen."

"Oh, I am nearly sixteen. I tell Uncle Alick that I am quite grown up now. Do you know, Eden, I have got a lot of new dresses from town, in case my Lady Perfection comes down this summer. I made Uncle Alick take me, and we went to the Métropole, and had a real good old time. Oh, it was just scrumptious;" and Bonnie screwed up her eyes with ecstasy. "We were to have stayed a fortnight, only one night at the theatre Uncle Alick seemed rather queer and out of sorts, and when we got back he said I must pack up and come home with him the next day.

I was just mad with him, and nearly cried my eyes out; but it was not a bit of use. When Uncle Alick gets into one of his cranky moods, and puts his foot down, one is obliged to mind him. But he was pretty well punished, for I would hardly speak to him for days. Now he is going to take the dogs for a run, and I will show you over the house."

After all, the morning had not been wasted, thought Eden, as she trudged after Bonnie from basement to garret; at least she had gained some insight into the singular and volatile nature that she was bent on studying.

Bonnie was not wholly frivolous, but she was self-willed, opinionated, and very undisciplined, and her manners were frankly boyish. Eden was not without hope that in time she might gain an influence over her. Bonnie was affectionate by nature, and though not yielding, Eden felt that she would be open to reason. She was much impressed with Heatherwood. There were a great many fine pictures, and the collection of books in the library was evidently a valuable one; all the rooms were well proportioned and well furnished, and the drawing-room con-

tained some very beautiful Indian carved cabinets. Bonnie seemed very proud of her home, and she was very much gratified at Eden's admiration.

"Do you know, there is only one thing I miss," observed Eden, glancing round her; "I do not see any flowers. The wild garden is charming, but there are no flower-beds."

Then Bonnie tossed her head with a curious little smile. "You are hard to please, Eden. But you have not seen everything yet." And then she led the way down the front drive and across the road, and opened a green door in the wall. "Will this satisfy you?" she asked; and as Eden crossed the threshold she found herself in a little green paradise. A smooth bowling-green was before her, with grassy banks, arches covered with climbing roses and purple clematis spanned the paths. The flower-borders were masses of brilliant colours, and the air was perfumed with a hundred sweet odours. The stillness, the seclusion, and the silence of this little walled-in garden, enchanted Eden; but the next moment, to her surprise, she heard the unmistakable twang of a banjo. Then Bonnie's eyes grew

mirthful, and she put her finger on her lip warningly. "We will steal a march on him," she whispered.

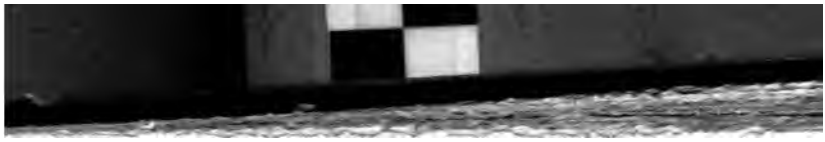
Then, as they trod in stealthy fashion over the grass, the twanging grew louder, and a clear and most melodious voice began in a spirited manner:

"I'd only de poor old banjo,
Not a friend in de world but dat,
An' many a cent it brought me
Throw'd into my ragged hat;
An' many a mile I trabbled
Since first to dis land I came,
Whar no one wanted a darkey
Dat's ragged an' old an' lame.

"Tune up for the chorus, my Lady Frivol, and sing in tune, please.

"Oh! boys for de Kingdom yonder,
Whar nothin' grows worn an' old;
Oh! boys, for de shining raiment,
An' oh! for de harps, de harps of gold!"

"He has got ears like 'Fairy Finear's,'" muttered Bonnie, in a disgusted voice. "I never can take that boy by surprise." And then she turned into a shady little corner, and Eden, following her, saw a pale youth swinging lazily in a hammock,



with his eyes fixed with a seraphic expression on the leafy roof above him.

"Oh! boys, for de shining raiment,"

he chanted;

"An' oh! for de harps, de harps of gold!"

"Shut up, Joslyn, and don't play the fool," remarked Bonnie crossly. "I want to introduce you to Miss Lloyd. Eden, this is the playfellow I mentioned—Lord Joslyn Trevor."

CHAPTER VII

A MODERN APOLLO AND HIS LUTE

"I knew him, Horatio: a 'fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy."—*Hamlet.*

"WHAT a beautiful boy!" was Eden's first thought, as a pair of melancholy brown eyes withdrew themselves slowly, as though from some celestial vision, and fixed themselves on her face with an expression of reproachful sweetness.

Then Lord Joslyn raised himself languidly in the hammock and gently slithered to the ground —no other word could convey that swift and silent descent. Then he drew himself up, and, bowing with an air of polite reserve, propped himself with easy grace against the tree. "I regret extremely," he said, and his voice was as smooth as honey, "that Miss Lloyd should have heard my poor attempt at minstrelsy; my efforts in that line are, as I am painfully aware, very futile and amateurish.

If Chevalier, for instance, had sung 'De Broken Banjo,' he would have brought tears from your eyes; indeed, when I think of that great master of coster melody, and of his delicate and masterly rendering of 'My Old Dutch,' I could almost weep myself"—and here Lord Joslyn pressed his banjo tenderly to his breast.

But Bonnie only frowned and stamped her foot. "Don't be such an idiot, Joslyn—as though you did not know that we were listening to you. He is the biggest fraud out, Eden. He is always so well-mannered and so prettily behaved to strangers that they think him the nicest boy in the world, until they find him out; but he is as full of mischief as my jackdaw."

"Like the father of all apes and the great chimpanzee," murmured Joslyn sweetly. Then his manner changed, and he twanged his banjo briskly. "The Poodles' Breakdown," he said peremptorily; and then Pomp and Vanity uttered shrill barks of delight, and stood on their hind legs before their mistress.

Eden sat down on a tree-trunk and watched the performance, for Bonnie was now executing a sort of slow waltz, and the poodles were revolving

round her ; sometimes they were on two legs and sometimes they were on four; and all the time Joslyn twanged louder and faster, and Bonnie waltzed on, the sunshine slanting down through the green leaves on her bright face and ruddy hair.

Eden wished she could have painted the little scene, it was so innocent and so Arcadian. The graceful young figure of the musician, leaning against the acacia, a modern Apollo and his lute ; the perfect profile and the mischievous gleam of the heavy-lidded eyes. Then my Lady Frivol dancing on the greensward, with her black satellites revolving round her. It was no wonder that Eden thought it a charming tableau, and that she was sorry when Joslyn gave his final twang and Bonnie flung herself on the grass with the panting dogs beside her. "Aren't they regular darlings?" she gasped.

But Joslyn made no answer. He had taken off his straw hat, and was handing it to Eden with an ingratiating smile. "For the performing troupe," he murmured. "One penny, ladies and gentlemen, for the Redford performing troupe." Then Bonnie threw an acorn at him.

IT WAS SO INNOCENT AND SO ARCADIAN.

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She took one deliberately out of her pocket, and hit him somewhat smartly on the cheek.

Joslyn rubbed the place tenderly; then he put back his handkerchief with a sigh. "I am going home to Grannie," he said in grieved tones. "Miss Lloyd, you are witness to this base and unjustifiable assault on an invalid;" and here Joslyn seemed to collapse suddenly with extreme exhaustion, and he even limped slightly. "Good morning, Miss Lloyd. Bonnabel, I regret that I shall be unable to ride with you to Elsenham this afternoon; I must stay at home and nurse my wounded cheek." Here he caressed the slight down on his upper lip, and smoothed it fondly. "There, I forgive you, my child," with lofty magnificence; "I bear no malice, Bonnie—we must not be hard on the follies of youth;" then he limped back and delivered his parting shot. "I forgot to tell you, my Lady Frivol, that Amabel is coming down to the Dene next Thursday, and that she will probably stay all August." Then he went off, and they could hear him carolling in the distance:

"Oh! boys, for de shining raiment,
An' oh,! for de harps, de harps of gold."

"He is in one of his craziest moods," observed Bonnie; but she spoke rather crossly. "Now I wonder if he was telling me a lie about Lady Amabel. I don't believe she is coming until the end of August; she was going to Windermere first. It will be no use my asking him," she went on, "for he will only tell me a pack of lies. I will make Uncle Alick find out; he is rather fond of going to the Dene—it is one of the places he likes best. Oh, I'll be even with you, my lad;" and Bonnie snapped her fingers vindictively at the retreating figure.

"Lord Joslyn is very amusing," was Eden's comment, as they walked on in the direction of the Log Hut; "but he is not a boy, Bonnie; he certainly looks about eighteen or nineteen."

"Ah! he was nineteen last birthday," replied Bonnie carelessly. "He is to go to Christ Church in October. He is a toff, you know; and he is dreadfully grown-up when he chooses, but now and then he likes to play the fool. He is the oddest boy I ever knew; sometimes he will be full of pranks, as he was this morning, and an hour later he will be on his high horse and as grave as a judge."

"He looks very pale and delicate."

"Yes, I know; but he is ever so much better. When he first came down to the Dene he used to lie in a hammock all day, but now he bikes and rides and plays tennis. I do so hope that that precious sister of his is not really coming to spoil our fun." Bonnie said this so earnestly, and with such fervour, that Eden felt surprised.

"I should have thought Lady Amabel's society would have been pleasant to you, as you and her brother are such friends," observed Eden.

But Bonnie gave her usual shrug. "Oh, I hate strangers, especially if they are my age," she said irritably. "Ah, I forgot, Lady Amabel is nearly seventeen; she is to be presented next season—but she is a paragon, a piece of perfection, as I told you. We shall have nothing in common, absolutely nothing; and I wish to see as little of her as possible. There, I must leave you, because Uncle Alick wants a game of tennis before luncheon; ta-ta until to-morrow, black Friday, you know;" and Bonnie raced off with her black body-guard.

Eden felt a little tired after her exciting morn-

ing, so when her early dinner was over she took her work and book into the porch. A wicker chair with red cushions had been placed there for her use: nothing could be more comfortable. After tea she thought that she would write to Hillis and Ivy, and then go for a stroll.

Eden felt as though her lines had fallen in pleasant places as she sat in the shady porch looking out on the fir-woods; her book was interesting, and she only laid it down to watch a pair of fantail pigeons that were strutting up and down the path. The cooing of doves from the roof filled the air with drowsy melody, and mingled pleasantly with the humming of innumerable bees. The only sounds of home life were Susan's clogs, as she clattered across the courtyard on her way to the well or pigstye. Presently her white sun-bonnet peeped round the corner. "Here's a visitor to see you, Miss Lloyd," she said loudly; "it is the Vicar's lady from Hencotes;" and the next moment Mrs. Ferard came towards her.

"You see, I have soon kept my promise," she said, smiling; "but I am going to have tea at

the Dene with my dear old friend Lady Margaret, so I thought I would look in on my way. Well, how do you like your hermitage, Miss Lloyd? Is not this old porch charming? Dear me, you look as comfortable and as cool as possible;" and then Eden fetched her a chair, and they sat down cosily together.

After all, it was Eden who talked most. Mrs. Ferard had come prepared to hear Miss Lloyd's impressions of her new surroundings; she questioned her eagerly about her interview with the Squire, and laughed heartily at her abrupt dismissal.

"It was just like him," she exclaimed; "and, of course, he wore his blue spectacles. Don't I remember the day when Augustine first took me with him to Heatherwood. I behaved very well on the whole; but directly we left the house I burst into convulsions of laughter, and Augustine, who is very sedate and proper, scolded me well; and all the time that naughty child Bonnie was grinning at us from an upper window like a little gnome. Well, so you are to begin lessons to-morrow. I am glad to hear it; the sooner my Lady Frivol sets to work in real earnest, the

better for her." Then there was a little more talk, and presently Mrs. Ferard rose.

"Lady Margaret is expecting me; I must not stay any longer. Isn't Joslyn a dear fellow? We are all so fond of him. But we will finish our chat another day. Will you come and have tea with me on Saturday? Saturday is Augustine's sermon day, and he is always shut up in his study, so we can just chatter as much as we like. Any one will tell you the way to Hencotes. The Retreat is very near our Tin tabernacle;" and then she ran off, and Eden, much cheered by this neighbourly visit, took up her book again.

The next morning Eden walked over to Heatherwood at the appointed time. Bonnie had already paid her a flying visit. She was sitting in the porch after her early breakfast, reading a letter from Hillis, when she heard the trampling of hoofs, and there was Bonnie, in her riding-habit, and Jan following her, with his slender nose on her shoulder. Eden thought the girl had never appeared to greater advantage; the slim young figure looked supple and graceful, the severe lines of the habit suited her to perfection,

and, with her bright eyes, and the healthy colour on her cheeks, my Lady Frivol looked really pretty. An invisible net confined the ruddy locks, and the soft white throat was clearly visible.

"I told Uncle Alick that I meant to pay my respects to teacher," observed Bonnie cheerfully, "so he said he would ride on to the house alone. Look here, Eden, you need not bother to ring the bell; Randall is old, and not fond of unnecessary trouble. Just walk in and go straight to Aunt Janie's room; you will find lots to amuse you until I come. Now, Jan, leave off nibbling my ear;" and then Bonnie gave a little *pirouette* amongst the heather. "Will you, won't you—will you, won't you—will you, won't you, join the dance?" and lo! and behold, Jan suddenly curveted and began to back playfully. Finally, his hind legs were kicking in the air; but Bonnie only pranced and danced beside him. The last thing that Eden saw of them was that Jan was one side of a tree and Bonnie the other, and that they were skirmishing merrily round it. Then Jan evidently got loose, for she could hear galloping hoofs in the wood.

Certainly Jan was as great a madcap as his mistress.

On the whole, Eden was fairly satisfied with the result of her first morning's work. Bonnie was by no means a docile pupil, but she was quick and intelligent, and though she wasted a good deal of time in unnecessary argument, she was evidently desirous of gaining knowledge. Eden was just the teacher for her: she was patient and sympathetic, and knew how to interest her. She had no dry-as-dust theories, and was fully aware that Bonnie's lawless nature needed plenty of scope.

Aunt Anne had once told Hillis that Eden was born to be a teacher. She had studied hard, and passed several examinations, and during those quiet years at Lavender Cottage she had kept her hand in by giving French and music lessons to the vicar's motherless girls. Indeed, if report said true, a very little encouragement on Eden's part would have emboldened the good vicar to invite her to the vicarage as its mistress. It was the fear of this that made Eden hurry her preparations for leaving the cottage after her aunt's death.

The first week of Eden's stay at Huntsmoor

passed pleasantly enough; a few passages from a letter to Hillis proved this.

"I begin to feel quite at home in my hermit life," she wrote, "and at present it suits me admirably. I am becoming deeply interested in my pupil. Bonnie has the most fascinating personality; she is full of surprises—a thing of moods and tenses, as dear Aunt Anne used to say. One can never be dull or *ennuyée* in her society. I rather like a character that can only be known and understood by degrees. Some people appear to me like a flat tableland. You can see all round them at once. Bonnie is just a little bit of mountainous country, all lights and shades, with perhaps a thunder-cloud or two in the distance. You know what I mean, dear.

"My duties as *chaperone* baffle me at present. If I could be more at Heatherwood—but, as I told you, I am dependent on stray invitations. If Bonnie would only look upon me in the light of an elderly playfellow we should understand each other better, but I am not without hopes of bringing down my bird.

"One afternoon she drove me to Wildcroft in

the dog-cart, and Lord Joslyn enacted the part of groom. He is a very nice boy, gentlemanly and sensible when I get him to myself; but he and Bonnie are always teasing and quarrelling with each other.

"Now I am going to shock Rosamond. You must break it gently to her—but I am going to learn to bicycle; Bonnie and Lord Joslyn have promised to teach me.

"You see, one must move with the age, Hillis, and as 'all the world's on wheels, dear,' I shall be left behind unless I am on wheels too. I put it to you, as a sensible man, how am I to *chaperone* a girl properly when she is always vanishing into space? No, no; to do my duty properly I must bicycle with her, and I am sure you will agree with me in this."

"Really, I hardly expected this of Eden," observed Rosamond, in rather a judicial voice, as Hillis read his letter aloud; "she has always been so sedate and proper."

"Eden is just beginning to realise that she is not an old maid," returned Hillis, with an amused smile; "it was impossible for her to be young

at Lavender Cottage, bless her dear heart; she seems as well and happy as possible;" and then he sat down and wrote one of the warm-hearted, affectionate letters that Eden prized so dearly, and which always cheered her for the day.

CHAPTER VIII

AS WELCOME AS A STRAY SUNBEAM"

"Some men, like pictures, are fitter for a corner than a full light."—SENECA.

MORE than a fortnight had passed since Eden had taken up her abode at the Log Hut, but there had been no second interview with Mr. Redford; it was quite evident that he shunned her. Once she had met him face to face in the hall at Heatherwood, and he had only bowed with a muttered "Good morning," and passed on. Another day she had gone into the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Russell, and saw him on the old bench by the well, sawing wood vigorously; but directly he had caught sight of her he had stopped his work and put on his cap. Susan, who was coming up the garden path with her apron full of vegetables, exclaimed in surprise, "Why, you are never going away, Squire, and all that wood lumbering up the place!"

"Oh, I will come and finish it another day," he returned hurriedly. "Don't worry yourself, Susan. I have to write a letter or two before post time;" and then he put on his cap and marched off.

"I am afraid it is my fault, Mrs. Russell," observed Eden; and there was a little chagrin in her voice. Mr. Redford's misanthropical avoidance of her society was not pleasant to her feelings. "Directly the Squire saw me, he left off his work."

"Eh, that is just like him," returned Susan; "he is that shy that the sight of a petticoat makes him sheer off like a frightened heifer. It is ridiculous, as I tell George, that a big, powerful man like our Squire should be so faint-hearted. He is a grand hand at work, too"—looking regretfully at the littered yard; "sawing wood and cutting down trees is just play to him. He will work with the men when they are hedging and ditching or putting up fences, and do about as much as two of them; and yet he is a fine scholar, and often sits up half the night over his books. But there, he is a curious mixture; no wonder strange folk find it difficult to understand him."

And then Susan went off with her vegetables, and Eden returned to her parlour, feeling slightly ruffled.

On Sunday she had a good view of the Squire, for the verger put her into a seat behind those where he and Bonnie sat, and she was much edified by his devout behaviour. He sang lustily, and made all the responses in a loud voice. Bonnie's conduct was more open to criticism ; she looked about her, fidgeted during the excellent sermon, and rose with visible alacrity when the good vicar closed his discourse: my Lady Frivol was evidently a civilised little heathen.

Eden, who followed them out, was amused at the contrast between them. Bonnie was nodding and smiling, and seemed on good terms with her neighbours, but the Squire only raised his hat once or twice, and walked on stiffly. He had a fine, upright carriage, and marched with a sort of military precision. There was something striking in his appearance, for strangers always noticed him—the strong, weather-beaten face and tall, muscular figure attracted their attention. Eden had already begun her bicycling lessons ; and as both her teachers were young and venture-

some, she soon made progress, though at the expense of some bruises.

"Joslyn says you have plenty of pluck," Bonnie assured her once, rather patronisingly. "He declares most ladies are a bit squeamish at first, and funk a fall." And Eden knew this was high praise.

Lady Amabel had arrived at the Dene. As Eden came out of church the second Sunday, she saw Lord Joslyn a little way in front. He was walking with a tall, fair-haired girl in white, and they were hurrying on, as though to overtake the Squire and Bonnie. Even at that distance Eden could see that Bonnie was trying to escape them. She was walkng very fast, with her head in the air; but Lord Joslyn, who had a will of his own, was not likely to be beaten, and before long the four were marching up the road together in the direction of Heatherwood.

The next morning Eden found a three-cornered note lying on her plate; it was in Bonnie's handwriting; the contents were as follows:

"Mr. and Miss Redford request the pleasure of Miss Lloyd's company to dinner on Wednesday next, the 24th instant, at 7.30. R.S.V.P."

"I shall answer verbally," she said to herself; but she was somewhat taken aback when Mrs. Russell informed her that the bearer was waiting for her answer.

She was still further surprised to find that Bonnie made no sort of allusion to her invitation; she only informed her that she and Uncle Alick were going to play tennis at the Dene, so that Eden could not have her bicycling lesson. Indeed, she was so reserved and unapproachable, so absorbed in her studies, and so determined not to be drawn into any discussion, that Eden was nonplussed. Never had her pupil behaved in such an exemplary manner.

The next morning things were much the same, and again there was to be no bicycle lesson, as Bonnie intended to drive to Elsenham. Eden was not invited to accompany her, so she made up her mind to walk over to Hencotes. Mrs. Ferard had given her a general invitation, and had told her that Tuesday was one of her leisure afternoons. She had already been introduced to the vicar; he was a tall, grave-looking man, rather absent in manner, and a little silent in mixed company, but in his own house he was kind and hospitable.

From the first Eden seemed to interest him. He considered her sensible and extremely intelligent, and just fit for her position; and Eden, on her side, thought Mr. Ferard was exactly her ideal of a country parson. He was zealous and earnest, and, in spite of his absent mood, he had great influence over his people, and rich and poor respected him. As for his wife, Eden very soon discovered that Mrs. Ferard almost worshipped the ground her husband walked on. Her single-hearted devotion to him was most touching. Augustine was simply perfect in her eyes. They had only had one child, a girl, who had died of diphtheria when she was four years old; and Mrs. Russell had once told Eden that they had never quite recovered from the shock.

"In my opinion," observed Susan, "it was the vicar who suffered most—at least, he took it hardest; as for Mrs. Ferard, she was so wrapped up in him that she seemed to forget her own grief in trying to comfort him. He just doted on the child. They always called her Fay; she was like a fairy, the prettiest little creature, with blue eyes and golden hair that used to shine in the sunlight; and she would be for ever trotting at

the vicar's heels, with her dollie or her kitten in her arms—mostly the kitten."

"Mrs. Ferard was telling me about her the other day," returned Eden, in a low voice.

"Oh, she is like me, Miss Lloyd; it eases her to talk out her troubles a bit. Now, the poor vicar is quite different. Since little Fay died—and that is more than five years ago now—no one has heard him mention her name, unless he may talk sometimes to his wife; but he has never been the same man since. He seems absent-like, as though his thoughts were elsewhere; but if you only look at his face sometimes, when he is reading about Jairus' daughter, or the Master blessing the little children, you would know what I mean. I have seen him clutch his hands together upon his surplice, as though to steady himself, and his face would go quite white. I have been all in a tremble sometimes to hear him, his voice would be so pitiful over 'Suffer the little children';" and here Susan wiped her eyes on the corner of her apron. "Oh, it is a strange sort of world, Miss Lloyd. Some folk have their quiver full when they haven't bread enough for themselves,

and others have their one treasure taken from them, and carry hungry hearts to their grave;" and here poor Susan gave a sob, for she had buried her only child, and she spoke feelingly.

Eden found Mrs. Ferard at work in her sunny little drawing-room. She welcomed her guest most cordially, and bade her take off her hat and make herself comfortable.

"I was just making up my mind that I should have a solitary afternoon," she said briskly, "so you are as welcome as a stray sunbeam. Well, are you going to dine at Heatherwood to-morrow, to meet Lady Amabel Trevor? Oh, of course we are going"—as Eden seemed surprised at the question; "we generally dine every fortnight or so with the Squire. But this seems something out of the common, for Bonnie asked me to bring our nephew, as he is coming down for a couple of nights. He is by no means a favourite with my Lady Frivol—he teases her so unmercifully; but I suppose she wants another gentleman."

"Is your nephew grown up?"

"Very much so, I assure you; but Phil is really Augustine's nephew; he is the son of his eldest sister, and is over thirty. He is a barrister, and

very clever; but I am afraid Bonnie is right—Philip certainly thinks too much of himself; it is such a pity, for it spoils him so."

"I wonder Mr. Redford can bring himself to give a dinner-party," returned Eden. "I thought that sort of thing was not in his line at all."

"No, you are right; but I expect Bonnie has coaxed him into it: you may be sure that she put it all very cleverly. I believe that little minx is up to some mischief. I asked her what she was going to wear, and she positively refused to answer me; and when I offered to help her with the flowers, she cocked her chin, and returned, in the most crushing manner, that she needed no assistance. 'Mrs. Pern and I have settled the *menu*,' she said; and you would have thought the chit was a grand-duchess at least. 'I hope you will bring Mr. Bellamy with you, as we are an uneven number;' and then she flounced off on some excuse or other."

"Mr. Redford seems very fond of Bonnie," observed Eden. "It is true I have only once seen them together, but, from what I can judge, he seems to spoil her terribly."

"I am afraid you are right," returned Mrs. Ferard; "and I have often lectured him on the subject, but have made no impression; he is perfectly devoted to her, and she can coax him into anything."

"Has she always lived with him?"

"Yes, ever since Cecil died. Cecil was his younger brother. Perhaps you are not aware that Bonnie has a mother living?"

"No, indeed;" and Eden looked extremely surprised.

"Most people here know it, and, of course, Bonnie is aware of the fact; indeed, she has often questioned me on the subject. It is rather a sad story altogether, but there is no reason why you should not hear it—indeed, in your position it will be better for you to know about things, and perhaps you will then make greater allowances for our poor Squire. Oh, I am pretty sharp, Miss Lloyd, and I know you are a bit huffy with him on account of his unsociability; but I assure you he is just as cross-grained to other ladies. He has grown into a surly old misanthrope of late years; but, let me tell you—and I have Lady Margaret's authority for it—that, when he was

younger, he was a most fervent worshipper of the fair sex, and a most chivalrous and gallant gentleman. When Madelon Lefevre came down to the Dene, he just lost his heart to her, and this was the beginning of his troubles."

It was evident that Eden was intensely interested, and Mrs. Ferard, who dearly loved the sound of her own voice, and was always delighted to find a good listener, took up her knitting and went on with her narrative.

"Madelon Lefevre was of French extraction, but her mother was English. During her parents' lifetime she lived in Paris; but after their death she was without friends and in poor circumstances, so she came over to England, and shortly afterwards Lady Margaret engaged her as a sort of governess-companion to her daughter Geraldine. Geraldine died a year after her marriage—she married the Hon. Gerard Arbuthnot, Lord Cluny's second son—but at this time she was only sixteen, and still in the schoolroom.

"We had not come to Huntsmoor then, and I never saw Mademoiselle Lefevre; but Lady Margaret was not blind until long afterwards, and she has described her to me. She said she had

never seen a more interesting young creature, and that, though not strictly handsome, she might almost have been termed beautiful.

"She was exquisitely graceful, and her dancing was the very poetry of motion. Of an evening, when she was pleased or excited, her pale olive complexion would be tinged with a lovely colour, like the crimson down of a peach, and her brown, velvety eyes would grow dark and brilliant—at such moments there was no doubt of her beauty. But she had other attractions: her voice was low and sweet, and there was an indescribable fascination about her that made other English beauties almost commonplace beside her. One evening—it was Geraldine's birthday—they had *tableaux*. One of the subjects was Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, standing at her tent-door, with the murdered Sisera at her feet. Madelon's rendering of Jael was almost masterly in its conception: the picturesque Oriental dress suited her to perfection, and her dark hair hung in thick, glossy plaits to her knee under her turban; a slow, almost cruel smile of triumph seemed to play round her lips as she looked down at the dead man stretched under the goatskin before her. It was consum-

mate acting, but Lady Margaret averred it made her shiver. She could not have believed that the gentle, shy girl would have been capable of enacting such a character.

"The applause was tremendous; people clapped until their hands were sore. Mr. Redford was the only one who had no word of praise for Jael; but that night he and Madelon were engaged. Ah! here comes Augustine; that means that it is tea-time. We must break off now for a little;" and then the vicar stepped through the open window and shook hands with Eden.

CHAPTER IX

MADELON

"No soul is desolate as long as there is a human being for whom it can feel trust and reverence."—GEORGE ELIOT.

"God's mill grinds slow but sure."—HERBERT.

NEVER had the good vicar been so unwelcome; even tea was felt to be a hindrance. Eden had been so interested. Mrs. Ferard was such an admirable narrator; she was so animated, she threw herself into her story with such zest and vivacity, that her hearer could picture it all as she went on.

Eden was vexed at her own impatience of the vicar's slow speech and absent ways; she wondered how long he meant to sit there stirring his tea, and dropping short, concise remarks from time to time. Evidently he was not in a sociable mood; perhaps his day had gone heavily with him. More than once his wife looked at him anxiously; but she made no remark, only there was a new note of tenderness in her voice when she addressed him.

"Augustine is tired," she said, when he at last went off to his study; "he has been to the Howells' this afternoon. Dear little Annie was buried last week, and the poor mother is almost broken-hearted. They say no one does her so much good as Augustine, and he has been there every day since the funeral; but it tries him so, poor dear—it tries him cruelly, though we cannot expect them to think of that; and now the clear brown eyes were a little misty; then she added, in a sad voice, "To-morrow is Fay's birthday; if our darling had lived she would have been nine years old—quite a great girl, and learning her lessons. Ah well, I try to comfort myself by thinking that the angels are teaching her now, my little Fay; and then the poor mother brushed away a tear or two as she rang the bell for the maid to take the tea-things; then she went off to her husband, and when she came back she looked her cheerful little self again.

"Now I may as well go on with my story," she said, taking up the sock that she was knitting for her husband. "Let me see, where did I leave off? Oh, I remember. Madelon Lefevre had

made her mark that night at the Dene, and her impersonation of Jael had been a regular triumph; that evening Alick Redford lost his head, and before he left the house Madelon had promised to be his wife.

"If ever a man was happy, the Squire was that night. He had won his heart's desire; his love for his young *fiancée* bordered on idolatry. He simply lived for her, as Lady Margaret told me. Madelon's opinions, her girlish will, dominated him utterly; during their brief engagement he was entirely guided by her in everything.

"I daresay you are surprised to hear all this, Miss Lloyd, but very few people really understand Mr. Redford; his blunt, shy ways repel them. In reality his affections are strong and deep, and his nature is peculiarly sensitive; but he has suffered so much that he strives to hide his real feelings by wearing a mask of impenetrable reserve. 'A burnt child dreads the fire,' says the old proverb, and when a sensitive, warm-hearted man has been wounded in his tenderest part, his whole nature will become permeated with the bitterness of the poison; and after Madelon played him false he was never the same man again."

"Do you mean that she actually jilted him?"

"Yes—I am coming to that. At first she seemed deeply in love with him, and for three months at least she made him perfectly happy. Lady Margaret was very good to them both; the Squire spent most of his time at the Dene, and she had promised to give Madelon her *trousseau*.

"Mr. Redford was busy beautifying his house and getting it ready for his bride. The wedding day was fixed, and preparations begun in earnest, when his young brother Cecil came home from India with his regiment, and took up his abode at Heatherwood.

"The brothers were much attached to each other. Cecil was three or four years younger than Alick. He was a fair, handsome-looking man, but his nature was weak and self-indulgent. He had little stability of character, and when temptation assailed him he succumbed to it readily. 'Cecil is no one's enemy but his own,' had been once said of him, for his easy good-nature and engaging manners duped people. But these facile, weak natures are prone to evil—they are like ships that have lost their helm and broken away

from their anchor, and are at the mercy of the elements; wind and waves drive them hither and thither, and then they suffer shipwreck. Cecil loved his brother, but he loved himself better. If his nature was weak, his passions were strong; and alas! the first time he saw Madelon he fell in love with her."

"Oh, Mrs. Ferard, how dreadful! But he ought to have left Heatherwood at once."

"You are right—an honourable man would have done so; but it was like Cecil to parley with temptation. To do him justice, he did not yield without a struggle. He managed to hide his feelings from his brother, but in an unguarded moment he betrayed them to Madelon. The wretched girl had already transferred her affections to Cecil; the young officer, bronzed with Indian suns, seemed to her the most fascinating hero she had ever met. Before three weeks were over they were madly in love with each other, and as Madelon was still more unprincipled than Cecil, the result can easily be surmised.

"One evening in the garden at the Dene Madelon owned to Cecil that she regarded his brother with feelings that bordered on loathing;

that she would rather die than marry Alick; that Cecil was the beloved of her heart; and so on, and so on. And then and there, under the light of heaven's pure stars, they concocted their vile scheme, and agreed to leave Huntsmoor the following evening, and go up to London and be married by special licence. Cecil was to invent an excuse for running up to town, and he would meet her at the station at the time appointed.

"It was only two days before the weeding; the *trousseau* was complete, and the bridal dress and veil in Madelon's wardrobe; and the newly furnished rooms at Heatherwood were in perfect order.

"The next morning, as Alick Redford was standing in his library, looking at a beautiful diamond star and bracelet that were to be his wedding gifts to his bride, he heard a carriage stop, and the next minute Lady Margaret entered the room. She looked very pale, and there was a distressed look in her eyes. 'Alick,' she said, putting her hand on his arm, 'my poor boy, you will need all your courage, for I have come with terrible news.' Then, at the sight of her pale face, he staggered back.

"ALICK," SHE SAID, PUTTING HER HAND ON HIS ARM, "MY POOR BOY, YOU WILL NEED ALL YOUR COURAGE."

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"'Good God! Lady Margaret,' he gasped, 'is Madelon ill?'

"'No,' returned his friend sternly, 'it would have been better if she were ill, and were at death's door, than that this should have happened;' and then she handed him the telegram: 'Married Madelon Lefevre by special licence at St. Peter's, Eaton Square, this morning. Break it to Alick.—CECIL REDFORD.'"

"Oh, Mrs. Ferard!" exclaimed Eden indignantly, "how could any one be guilty of such cruelty?"

"My dear, it was the very refinement of cruelty; and the blow was struck by the two beings whom Alick loved most on earth. 'I would rather Cecil had stabbed me to the heart' were almost his first conscious words. But they found out afterwards that Madelon had dictated the telegram; and the letter that followed it, filled with hollow protestations of sorrow and remorse, and pleading piteously for forgiveness, was written also at her dictation."

"How did he—how did Mr. Redford bear the blow?" And Eden's voice was a little tremulous.

"Ah, that I cannot tell you. Lady Margaret

never told any one what passed between them; but she remained at Heatherwood all that day, and until late at night, and she once owned to me that she never thinks of those hours without a shudder. 'I put myself so much in his place that I think I suffered almost as much as Alick did. But then, poor fellow, he was so stupefied.' I never could get her to say another word.

"On the following morning—the very day that should have been his wedding day—Alick Redford left his home and went abroad.

"When he returned, nine months later, he looked an altered man; ten years seemed added to his age. He shut himself up at Heatherwood, repelling all his neighbours' attempts at sociability, taking long, solitary walks and rides, and spending his evenings over his books.

"Until Lady Margaret's blindness came on he refused to enter the Dene—the place was full of bitter memories to him; but she came to him constantly, and her womanly sympathy and strong common-sense greatly influenced him. He was a lonely, embittered man, and that act of secret treachery had well-nigh broken his heart; but one faithful woman's hand, stretched out in pity

and friendship, saved him from utter despair, and by-and-bye a new interest came into his life.

"He had absolutely refused to see his brother, or to hold any communication with him. With all his sternness, he was not vindictive, and the allowance that he had always given Cecil was still regularly paid to him through his lawyer. But when Cecil presumed on this generosity, and pleaded for still further help, the appeal met with a contemptuous refusal; and the letters Cecil wrote were committed to the flames unread.

"'My only brother is dead to me,' he once said to Lady Margaret. 'Does he think I will own a Judas for a brother? I wish him no ill, but from henceforth we are strangers to each other—no traitor's feet shall ever cross my threshold.' And Alick kept his word. The next time he and Cecil saw each other face to face was when Cecil lay on his death-bed.

"The only persons who knew anything of his movements were the lawyer Mr. Adams, and Lady Margaret—one of her sons was in the same regiment as Cecil.

"From Captain Alison's account, things were not going well with the Cecil Redfords; Madelon

had developed a temper, and was ruining her husband by her extravagance.

"Already her affection for him had cooled; and when a daughter was born to them, her neglect of the child, and her growing indifference to her husband, were openly criticised by the officers' wives: by one and all of them Madelon was feared and hated.

"Her subtle beauty and singular charm made her a dangerous rival; the admiring homage of men was the sweetest incense to her. Before long Cecil was reaping his punishment and suffering agonies of jealousy. He had to see the mother of his child surrounded by gay young subalterns at balls, or acting with them in private theatricals, while her baby girl was left to the care of an ignorant young nurse; and when Cecil lost his temper and reproached her, she only returned contemptuously that she had been a fool to marry him, that she would have been a better and happier woman as Alick's wife and the mistress of Heatherwood. Poor Cecil! weak, faulty, and treacherous as he was, he paid a bitter penalty for his wrong-doing; his ill-fated marriage had brought him nothing but misery, and before

their short honeymoon was over he had learnt Madelon's true nature.

"When Bonnabel was about four years old, Cecil's health failed; the regiment was quartered in Dublin then, but it was under orders for India. Their circumstances were terribly straitened by that time, and their increasing debts, due chiefly to Madelon's extravagance, were retarding all hopes of his recovery. Cecil grew daily worse; but Madelon still dressed and flirted and danced, and refused to believe that her husband was dying. 'If he would only pull himself together and exert himself, he would soon be all right,' she would say. But Cecil knew better.

"One day Lady Margaret came to Heatherwood. 'Alick,' she said abruptly to him, as she held his hand, 'you have been angry with your brother long enough! Death is a great peace-maker and heals all sores. Cecil is dying, and you must go to him; you and Janie are his only near relatives;' for Miss Redford, who had lived abroad many years on account of her health, had recently come to Heatherwood on a visit. Then, without a word, Alick started for Dublin that very night.

"They had a stormy passage; and when he

arrived at the hotel, he stopped to rest and refresh himself, and it was seven o'clock before he reached Cecil's lodgings.

"It was a winter's evening, and, strong as he was, the biting wind made him shiver; and he was thankful when, after waiting long, an untidy-looking servant admitted him into a dark passage with a smoky lamp dimly illuminating it.

"Alick followed her upstairs. He had already heard, to his great relief, that Mrs. Redford was out, and that his brother was alone. As the door opened he heard a child's voice, and a little girl came running out to meet them with a merry laugh; the little pale face and auburn curls reminded him of Cecil when he was a small boy.

"'Is it you, Uncle Alick?' she asked, in her pretty baby voice; and she pulled him by his coat. 'Poor dada is ill. Come and see dada.' And as the little one led him in, something in Alick's chill heart seemed to thaw and soften, and the stern lines of his face relaxed as he stepped to the bed where the sick man lay. 'Good heavens,' he thought, 'could this be Cecil—handsome, reckless, devil-may-care Cecil—so *débonnaire* and yet so weak of purpose; this poor wreck of a man, with

hollow eyes, dim with trouble and suffering?' And as the shadowy hand touched him, Lady Margaret's words came to his memory: 'Death is a great peace-maker and heals all sores.' And as he clasped Cecil's hand, the angry bitterness died out of his heart, and Cecil, looking piteously in his brother's face with a dumb prayer for pardon in his eyes, knew, from Alick's pitying expression, that at last he was forgiven."

CHAPTER X

A HUMAN BUTTERFLY

"Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof.
* * * *
No hinge nor loop
To hang a doubt on."
Othello.

MRS. FERARD'S voice became a little husky—it was evident that her narrative affected her; as for Eden, her eyes were fixed on the speaker's face, and she was so much engrossed by the story that she forgot the lateness of the hour. Mrs. Ferard knitted rapidly for a few minutes in silence, then she recommenced.

"A long and painful conversation took place between the brothers; Cecil's penitence for his treachery was deep and sincere, and Alick's forgiveness was full and ungrudging. For years he had told himself that his love for Cecil was dead; but he was wrong, it was only crushed and dormant, and as he looked at the wan,

pinched face of the dying man the old tenderness revived.

"'Alick,' observed Cecil faintly, as his brother smoothed his pillow and administered a restorative, 'you have forgiven me, and thank God for it; but there is something else that you must promise me if I am to die in peace;' and then he glanced at the cot where the child was now sleeping placidly; 'promise me that you will take charge of Bonnie—for Heaven's sake, for pity's sake, do not refuse me,' and the thin, skeleton fingers closed round Alick's wrist almost convulsively.

"'My dear fellow,' he said, in a distressed voice, 'do you know what you are saying? Bonnie has her mother.'

"Then something like a sob rose to Cecil's lips. 'Mother!' he gasped; 'God help my girlie if she is left to Madelon's tender mercies! Do you know where my wife is at this present moment, Alick? She is dancing at a ball—waltzing with a lot of empty-headed young fellows, and accepting their adoration.'

"'Impossible!' was the indignant response.

"Then a bitter smile came to the pallid lips. 'It is rather difficult to believe, is it not, Alick?

Not much like a loving wife and mother to leave two such poor, helpless creatures to the mercy of a lodging-house drudge; but you see, there was the new dress, and the colonel's wife had promised to take her; and what were the claims of a sick husband and a little child compared to those attractions? She is dining with them now, and then they are to go to the Castle together, and she will be the life of the room and the centre of all eyes—for, confound it, she is handsomer than ever!' And here Cecil almost wrung his hands together in a perfect anguish of bitterness.

"'I could not have believed it, even of her!' returned Alick, in a low voice.

"'I daresay not, for you never knew the real Madelon; but we had not been married many weeks before I read her truly. Love with her is ephemeral—it is a sentiment, a passion, nothing more. She soon tired of me; and as for her child, she never pretended to care for her.

"'Think of that, Alick—a girl baby, utterly neglected. You saw Bonnie just now—is she not an engaging little creature? Yet I have seen

Madelon push her away when the child ran up to her.

"'One day Bonnie came to me crying. "Mammy had hurted her," as she said; and there, sure enough, was an angry red patch on her dear little cheek, where Madelon had struck her. I was a fool, Alick; but I felt that moment as though my heart were broken, and I cried like a child myself.'

"'Don't go on, Cecil; I cannot bear to hear you. My dear boy, my poor fellow, yes, I will take the child, if you wish, and if'—here his voice changed and grew hard—'if Mrs. Redford'—he had never once pronounced the name Madelon since that terrible day—'if Mrs. Redford will undertake not to interfere with her.'

"'She will undertake anything that will rid her of such a burden; the darling is only a trouble and incumbrance to her. God bless you, Alick; you have taken a load off my mind. I could not have lain in my grave in peace if I had thought Bonnie was left to her mother. Hush! here she comes. What on earth has brought her back?' and Cecil moved uneasily on his pillow. The next

moment there was the soft *frou-frou* of silken garments; the door was flung open by no gentle hand, and a radiant vision appeared on the threshold, dressed, as it seemed to Alick's dazzled eyes, in a wonderful golden garment that had the sheen and gloss of satin. There was a diamond star in her dark hair, and, as Madelon moved towards them, a subtle fragrance, like the odour of freshly gathered violets, seemed to permeate the room.

"'I have forgotten my fan,' she observed lightly, 'and Mrs. Muncaster drove me to the door that I might fetch it;' and then she caught sight of Alick in the shadow of the curtain, and her face grew pale, and her eyes dilated with surprise. 'You here! You!' she exclaimed—hissed through her parted lips—and her eyelids dropped under Alick's keen look of scorn. His expression of unutterable contempt penetrated even her dense nature.

"'Yes, I have come,' he returned, in cold, measured tones. 'I have come in good time to witness how my brother's wife fulfils her conjugal duties. Are you aware of your husband's state, that you leave him for your own amusement and

pleasure? Is it possible that you do not see that he is at death's door?'

"'I see nothing of the kind,' she replied angrily. 'Cecil is an alarmist—he makes a fuss if his finger aches; he has a cold, a feverish cold—well, is that any reason why I should stay with him? I am not needed, I assure you,' flirting her fan hurriedly as she spoke. 'He and Bonnie are quite happy without me; I should be *de trop*—in the way,' and the smile round her lovely lips reminded him of Jael. 'Ta-ta, Cecil—I am glad you have your brother;' and she was actually leaving the room, when Alick, white with righteous indignation, and strong in his man's will, followed her down the stairs.

"Madelon misconstrued this action. 'Please go back,' she said, in her smooth tones; 'there is no need for this attention. My friends are waiting for me.'

"'So I understood,' was the curt answer; and then, with a deft movement, he passed her, as though to open the carriage-door; but he only laid his hand on it.

"'I regret to say, madam,' he observed, in a clear, hard voice, and addressing a lady wrapped

up in costly furs inside the brougham—'I regret to say that Mrs. Redford will be unable to accompany you to the ball at the Castle. My brother, Captain Redford, is much worse, and she cannot possibly leave him.'

"'My dear Madelon, I am so grieved,' returned a sympathising voice; 'what a comfort you have your brother-in-law with you! I will call to inquire to-morrow. Take care of yourself, love. Drive on, Williams.'

"But Madelon uttered no word. She stood in the windy entry as though she were turned to stone. It was like a nightmare to her. As the carriage drove away she tried to speak, to call out, but the words seemed to freeze on her lips.

"For once in her life she was mastered; but as Alick drew back to let her pass him, she whispered in his ear, 'I shall hate you all my life for this.'

"'My dear fellow, what have you been saying to Madelon?' asked Cecil nervously, as his brother re-entered the room; he looked flushed and alarmed. 'Madelon has the temper of a fiend, and if you interfere with her——' and he looked

at the door with an apprehensive glance that spoke volumes to Alick.

"'Don't be afraid,' he returned, in a soothing voice; 'your wife will not enter this room while I am here; and I do not mean to leave you. To-morrow I will see the doctor, and, if he approves, I will have you moved to more comfortable lodgings. We will leave Mrs. Redford to sleep off her ill-humour.' For that moment Alick had no pity, no ruth, for the unloving wife.

"Alick kept his word; the following day Cecil was taken in an invalid carriage to commodious and well-furnished lodgings. The poor fellow burst into tears when he looked round the large, cheerful room appropriated to his use. 'Coals of fire,' he groaned.

"'Is it really for us, dada?' exclaimed Bonnie, in a tone of awe; 'is this big, grand place for us?' And then Bonnie lifted up her voice and wept because there was no little white cot beside the bed.

"'Bonnie has no bed, no little bed at all,' she kept saying between her sobs. Then the bright-faced young nurse whom Alick had engaged to wait on his brother opened the dressing-room

door and showed her a little white bed in the corner. 'That is Bonnie's own room, and Bonnie's own bed,' she said, cuddling the little one as she spoke. Then was Bonnie's cup of bliss full to the brim.

"'It is my very own, dada,' she said excitedly, as she rushed to her father; 'it is this lady what told me so; she did say that is Bonnie's bed—her own, own bed;' then, for the first time, something like a smile played round Cecil's lips. Madelon made no remark at all; she took possession of the comfortable sitting-room, and never entered the sick room when Alick was there.

"Alick had taken up his abode at the hotel near. He could not have broken bread under the roof that covered Madelon; a curious loathing had taken the place of his passionate love. Her beauty was to him simply a fine mask that disguised the real woman. At last he knew her to be hard, selfish, and soulless—a human butterfly, to whom pleasure and fine clothes and flattery were daily necessities; who hated the duties and responsibilities of wifehood and motherhood, and cared little or nothing for her own child.

"Alick never saw her when he came into the house; it was evident that she shunned him. Now and then, as he sat by Cecil's couch, he would hear her voice as she greeted some friend, and once he saw her go downstairs in her riding-habit.

"It was a month before the end came. Cecil died peacefully, with his hand in his brother's. Bonnie was asleep in her little bed. Madelon did not come near them; some one told Alick that she was in strong hysterics, and that the woman of the house was with her. The next day she was surrounded by her special cronies; but she refused to enter the chamber of death, or to look at her husband in his last sleep.

"'It would kill me; I will not go,' she said angrily when the nurse remonstrated with her; for these hard, soulless natures have their superstitious terrors, and it may be that Madelon dared not look on the features of the husband she had neglected in life.

"The day after the funeral Alick formally asked for an interview with his brother's widow. It was necessary that he should see her on business, he said; and Madelon consented reluctantly. She

feared as well as hated her old lover instinctively; she felt that he had taken her true measure, and despised her; and she was right.

"Madelon had never appeared less to advantage than she did that day; her heavy mourning made her complexion sallow. If her heart had not suffered, her nerves had, and she looked old and worn.

"When the form of greeting had passed between them—for Alick made no attempt to touch her hand—he briefly stated his business.

"He informed her that his brother had left nothing but debts behind him; the pension that she could claim as his widow would not suffice to keep her—certainly not with her extravagant habits; but he would promise to allow her a small income, to be paid half-yearly, through his lawyer, if she would resign all rights to her child.

"'I have promised Cecil to bring her up as my own child, and to provide for her future,' he went on; 'but you must please to understand that there must be no interference. As I dislike unnecessary mysteries, Bonnie will know she has a mother living, but that her mother has renounced her.

Will you kindly inform me if you assent to this?'

"'Wait a moment, Mr. Redford;' and here Madelon's eyes glittered ominously. 'What if I refuse these monstrous terms? What if I choose to keep my own child?'

"'In that case,' returned Alick coolly, 'your debts will be unpaid, and you will never spend a penny of my money.' Then, secure of victory, he was actually moving to the door, when she called him back.

"'I consent,' she said sullenly. 'The child would only be in my way. As for you, Alick Redford'—here her voice was full of concentrated fury—'I never wish to see your face again.'

"So be it,' returned Alick. 'Will you forgive me if I say that I sincerely echo that wish? You and I must never cross each other's path again.' And to this day they have never met."

"And Bonnie knows about her mother?"

"Yes—I am afraid she is rather curious on the subject; but she told me that she dares not question her uncle. Of course, I tell her very little—only that her mother cares for her own comfort and pleasure more than for her child."

"Does any one know what has become of Mrs. Redford?"

"Of course, Mr. Redford's lawyer knows. A year or two after her husband's death Madelon went on the stage. Have you never heard of Daphne Chasmar, who made her mark in *The Enchantress*? The public rave about her. I have seen her myself in the character of Inez, and I assure you I was fascinated."

"'Daphne Chasmar'—that clever actress is really Madelon Redford?"

"Yes, my dear, and Madelon's acting is superb. The *rôle* of Inez exactly suited her, and with all my prejudice I was quite carried away by the fire and pathos of her acting. Some one told me that she had gone to America, but I do not know if this be true."

"Has she never married again?"

"No, I believe not. Mr. Redford still pays her allowance, and she has never made any effort to see her child. There, I have talked myself hoarse, and I expect I have tired you to death."

But Eden disclaimed this somewhat eagerly. "I assure you that I have never been more interested. I feel that I understand Mr. Redford

now, poor man. How nobly he behaved to his brother!" And then Eden took her leave, with a shocked exclamation at the lateness of the hour. "I have actually been here more than three hours," she said to herself, as she hurried through the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XI

AN EVENING WALK

"A proper man, as one can see in a summer's day."
Midsummer's Night's Dream.
"He hath indeed bettered expectation."
Much Ado About Nothing.

EDEN had plenty of food for thought as she walked down the long country road in the direction of the Log Hut and Heatherwood; there was something tragic and pitiful in the story she had just heard, that touched her woman's sensibility to the quick.

"Oh, the pity of it!" she kept saying over and over to herself; "the needless cruelty and heartlessness of it all!" And then, as she thought of the blighted life of those two men—one sinning, and one sinned against—she felt a sense of loathing against the woman who had been their baneful influence.

And Madelon was Bonnie's mother; then, as

Eden pondered over this grim complication, she had a sudden curious revulsion of feeling, as though some inward foreboding, some presentiment of evil, troubled her.

"How foolish I am!" she thought, trying to rouse herself from this uncanny mood. "I suppose that story has taken hold of me too strongly." And then she tried to shake off her oppression, and to enjoy the beauty of the summer evening.

It was rather a lonely stretch of road she was traversing, with meadows and enclosed grounds on one side, and a dark fir-wood on the other. Towards evening it was somewhat solitary; few vehicles passed, and one rarely met a human being —unless it were a labourer returning home after his day's work, or a child sent on some errand to the village.

Most people would have found the stillness and solitude somewhat oppressive; but Eden had excellent nerves, and she was accustomed to the country, and no fear of tramps crossed her mind. The crackling of the brambles and the rustle of dry leaves in the little wood did not even make her start; it was only when she heard quick footsteps behind her that she turned her head. To

her surprise, it was Mr. Redford. He was in his old velveteen coat, and carried a gun, and a couple of grey rabbits dangled limply over one shoulder; a beautiful brown-and-white retriever was with him. Eden fully expected him to pass her, but, to her great astonishment, he paused at her side.

"It is rather late for you to be in the woodlands," he said gravely; and Eden fancied his tone expressed disapprobation.

"I have been having tea with Mrs. Ferard," returned Eden hurriedly—the sudden apparition of the Squire had rather flurried her. Her mind had been so full of him and his troubles that his unexpected appearance somewhat discomposed her. "I did not expect to be quite so late; but we were talking, and the time passed."

"After seven the woodlands are a little lonely," observed the Squire, "and it is nearly eight now. Chief, lad, come to heel, and leave the rabbits alone. Five minutes ago I saw a couple of rather rough-looking navvies pass; they were evidently bound for 'The Three Crows.' They had already had a little too much, and were rather noisy. It would not be pleasant for a lady to encounter them."

TO HER SURPRISE, IT WAS MR. REDFORD.

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"Oh, no; thank you so much;" and Eden's colour rose. This was why Mr. Redford had laid aside his usual reserve, and was actually walking beside her, trying to accommodate his long, manly strides to her feminine ones. It was merely a chivalrous desire to protect a woman from a disagreeable encounter.

"The Three Crows" was just at the turn of the road: a mere cottage, with a rustic porch, and one low lattice window with snug red curtains, and it was much frequented by waggoners and wayfaring men.

Mr. Redford said no more—he seemed inclined to relapse into his usual taciturnity with strangers; but Eden, who was only too thankful that the ice had been broken, was determined to make the most of her opportunity. If the Squire chose to be silent, he could not prevent her from talking to him, as she would to any other gentleman of her acquaintance. "His shyness and *mauvaise honte* should not daunt her;" so she remarked cheerfully,—

"I find Mrs. Ferard such a pleasant companion. She is such a cheery little person, and so thoroughly kind-hearted. And I like the vicar, too."

"They are excellent people," returned the Squire; but he spoke rather stiffly. He had evidently slipped into his shell again.

"It was so sad, their losing their little girl," continued Eden placidly. "Mrs. Ferard showed me her photograph. She must have been such a lovely little creature; one cannot help wondering why good people are so heavily tried. Don't you think it is a mystery, Mr. Redford?"

"I have long given up all attempts to solve enigmas," was the gruff rejoinder. The Squire was looking straight before him, as though he were measuring the length of the road, and Eden somewhat hastily changed the subject.

"I suppose Bonnie will have returned by this time," she went on. "She has had a lovely evening for her drive. I am so glad Lady Amabel has come to the Dene; she will be such a nice companion for her."

"I don't believe Bonnie cares for girl companions," was the contradictory reply. "Anyhow, she and Lady Amabel don't seem to hit it off."

"Oh, what a pity!" exclaimed Eden; "what a grievous pity!" and she spoke with such genuine regret in her voice that the Squire turned round

and stared at her. She had never seen him closely without his blue spectacles. To her surprise, the rather deeply sunken grey eyes were full of fire and intelligence.

"Why do you speak in that tone, Miss Lloyd?" he asked testily. "What does it matter whether two girls get on with each other or not? Lady Amabel will move in quite another plane to my niece. Besides, their natures are utterly dissimilar."

"Perhaps so; but surely you will agree with me, Mr. Redford, that a companion of her own sex is better for Bonnie. She is nearly sixteen, and will soon be grown up; and though Lord Joslyn is charming, and I like him immensely, yet I cannot help thinking that——" Here Eden's full, steady tone faltered. Mr. Redford was looking at her with such stern questioning in his glance that she was afraid to finish her sentence.

"Why do you not go on?" he asked impatiently. "How am I to understand, if you do not explain your meaning, eh? I suppose Mrs. Grundy is finding fault because I allow Bonnie to scour the country with that boy Joslyn. Oh, it is that, is it?" eyeing her uneasily. "Pooh! Nonsense! Joslyn is only a lad. They are a couple

of children. Do you suppose Bonnie would consent to any absurd restrictions, even if they were proposed to her?"

Bonnie is not different from other girls;" and Eden put on her most proper governess airs. "All young ladies must submit to certain rules and restrictions. Do you know, I am thankful for this opportunity of speaking to you, Mr. Redford. I am very much interested in Bonnie; already I have grown to love her. She is a dear child, and she has some fine qualities, but she is sadly undisciplined; her sweetness and beauty of character are running to seed for want of the pruning hand."

It was evident that this plain speaking disturbed Mr. Redford. There was an anxious frown on his brow as he listened.

"You and Mrs. Ferard must have put your heads together," he returned, in rather a glum voice. "There is nothing wrong with my little girl: she is just high-spirited, and now and then, like Jan, she gets the bit between her teeth; but there is not a scrap of vice in either of them. No," he repeated, muttering the words to himself, "not a scrap of vice, thank God;" and some

strange transmission of thought told Eden that he was thanking God that Bonnie was not like her mother. Then he roused himself, and spoke in an irritable tone.

"If you do not approve of Bonnie being always with that lad, why are you not with her, Miss Lloyd? I understood from Mrs. Ferard that you would spend the afternoons at Heatherwood. Of course, it is not in the bond. If you are unwilling to devote so much time to Bonnie——"

But Eden eagerly disclaimed this. "Mr. Redford," she said, rather proudly, "you are paying me well, and I feel I am not really earning my salary. As far as I am concerned, my time is at your and Bonnie's disposal. I am not only willing, but anxious, to be her companion as well as governess. If she wishes for my company, I would drive or walk with her every afternoon; and I am even taking bicycling lessons that I may share her rides."

Here the Squire smiled furtively. "So I have heard. You are very conscientious, Miss Lloyd, and I thank you. I have no complaint to make; on the contrary"—here Mr. Redford cleared his throat; he had a decided return of shyness—

"I am afraid I am very unsociable, as my neighbours say. One gets into a groove, and it is difficult to move out of one's rut; but if you will befriend my little girl, I shall be infinitely obliged to you." Then he came to a full stop, and stood silent for a moment, as though he were thinking. "You were right, quite right, to state your opinions. I respect you for your honesty and frankness. I have not met with much frankness in my life. If you can obtain an influence over Bonnie, do so by all means. I believe she likes you, in spite of her childish impertinence; and if I can help you in any way, you must let me know. Here is the White Gate, and I can safely leave you. Good evening," and Mr. Redford raised his hat; but before Eden could open her lips to thank him for his escort, he was already striding down the road at a pace that would soon take him out of sight.

The gate swung back on its hinges as Eden stood motionless, with an absent look in her eyes.

"What a strange man!" she said to herself; "but I like him! All his eccentricity and irritability cannot hide his good heart. I do not believe that any one understands him except that

blind Lady Margaret." And the wish crossed Eden's mind at that moment that she could see that loyal and faithful friend who had held out her woman's hand to him when he had been driven well-nigh mad with trouble. It was only a random wish, and she never expected it to be realised.

Lady Margaret Alison was a great lady, but her weak health and infirmity had obliged her to lead a secluded life. There were callers at the Dene, but Miss Graham, Lady Margaret's companion, received them; and very few were admitted to the great sunny drawing-room, where Lady Margaret sat in the wide oriel window in her softly cushioned easy invalid chair. "I have done with the world, and the world has done with me," she would say. "An old woman lives mostly in the past; it is the friends of one's childhood and youth that always greet us with a smile, who have no cold looks for us; where our treasure is—ah, you can finish that sentence for yourself; you know it well." And then there would come on the lined, pallid face an expression of exceeding peace.

For there is a great law that people often fail

to realise—the law of compensation—and perhaps there was still much sweetness in Lady Margaret's life. She had had her past: a joyous girlhood, a happy wifehood and motherhood; the best gifts of life had been hers—beauty, intellect, and wealth, and the power of winning love. And then, when her prime had passed, her troubles had come thick and fast. First, her favourite daughter—she was Joslyn's mother—died; then her youngest son, done to death in one of those dearly bought frontier victories; then her husband; and it was shortly after this that her sight failed.

"I have enjoyed my life more than most people," she once said to Alick Redford, "and I should find it difficult to count up my blessings. Those who possess most, have most to lose; but as long as I have memory I dare not complain." So, though the aged mistress of the Dene was rarely seen, her good works and deeds of mercy were plentiful in Huntsmoor and Elsenham. "The good Lady Margaret," she was called; but it was her companion, Ethel Graham, who dispensed her bounties, and who added to the gifts many a soft and gentle word of sympathy.

When Eden came in sight of the Log Hut, she

found Susan standing by the wood pile. She was evidently looking for her.

"There now," she exclaimed, in a tone of relief, "I am thankful, that I am, to set eyes on you. George has been telling me that there are some rough-looking customers at the 'Three Crows,' and he was just cleaning himself up a bit, that he might go and meet you. It is a dull road through the woodlands, and it is getting latish, too."

"I am so sorry I have made you anxious," returned Eden, cheered by this kindly solicitude for her safety; "I am afraid I am inclined to be rather venturesome. Mr. Redford told me about the navvies; he said they were tipsy. I met him in the woodlands, and he walked with me to the gate." Eden spoke quite simply, but she flushed a little at Susan's look of surprise.

"You don't say so, Miss Lloyd; why, this beats everything—to think of the Squire putting himself out to be civil to a lady! George"—as her husband appeared in the entry—"there is no need for you to be meeting our young lady; the Squire brought her to the gate himself." Then she dropped her voice, but it was still audible to Eden. "I never knew him do so much for any-

body since Jane Brice had that fit coming from market, and he drove her home in his carriage. Don't you mind that day, George? Well, it was human-like of the Squire; and after all, when all's said and done, he is flesh and blood, like other folk." And with this oracular speech Susan tilted back her sun-bonnet, and went into the house to prepare the supper.

CHAPTER XII

"IN SILK ATTIRE"

"My salad days,
When I was green in judgment."
Antony and Cleopatra.

WHEN Eden went up to the *boudoir* the next morning at the usual hour, she found it empty, and it was nearly twenty minutes later before Bonnie flew in, looking flushed and heated, as though she had been running. As she turned her cheek to Eden, she remarked rather breathlessly,—

"I am afraid I am late, but I was in the garden, talking to Randall about the flowers; he is the stingiest old miser out: but I made Uncle Alick put his foot down." Then, with a pompous little air, "If I only knew what you were going to wear this evening, I would send you down some flowers; there are some lovely Maréchal Niel roses, and a splendid Cramoisie."

But Eden shook her head with a smile. "Thank you, dear, for the kind thought; but you see I am in mourning, and I do not care to make myself smart." She fancied Bonnie looked a little disappointed at this; she eyed Eden somewhat uneasily, and seemed about to remonstrate; then she changed her mind and opened her book.

Eden felt inwardly amused. She was shrewd enough to perceive that Bonnie was particularly anxious that her governess should appear to advantage that evening, and that she was not quite comfortable in her mind on the subject.

Eden's sense of humour was somewhat tickled by Bonnie's girlish pomposity and vanity. She was pleasantly aware that the pretty black dress at that moment lying on her bed was perfectly irreproachable in cut and taste, and that she would probably be as well dressed as any one in the room. This idea gave her a little glow of satisfaction, for when is any true woman indifferent to her clothes?

Bonnie said no more; she began reading one of Molière's plays, but it evidently required a strong effort to fix her attention on the page. When the Dresden clock on the mantelpiece chimed

one, she closed her book with a bang; and even Eden was relieved, for her pupil's abstraction and wandering attention had made her instruction more trying and fatiguing than usual.

"For what we have received," began Bonnie flippantly; but Eden's shocked look recalled her. "Dear me, Eden," she returned provokingly, "I don't see that I have said anything so dreadful. I thought you would have been edified by my youthful piety; but you are a regular Puritan." And here Bonnie turned down the corners of her mouth, and rolled her eyes until only the whites showed, and ambled across the room with mincing steps, and her pretty girlish hands crossed over her breast, while Pomp and Vanity barked round her, expecting a new game of play; then she lifted an imaginary apron to her eyes, and broke into tempestuous sobs.

"I won't bear it—no, that I won't!" And here Bonnie sobbed still more artistically, and the dogs barked more loudly. "I shall say my grace after lessons if I like. I am a dood dirl, I am, and I am going to heaven!" And then, before Eden could stop laughing, Bonnie had raced downstairs, and was singing, at the top of her fresh young

sarcastic curl, and even that first moment Eden discovered that he thought a good deal of himself; and she verified this opinion later on.

Mrs. Ferard had a lace scarf thrown over her dark, sleek little head; she greeted Eden warmly, and looked her over with approving eyes when she had laid aside her light wraps.

As they entered the drawing-room together, they saw a little group standing in the bay window. Mr. Redford came forward at once to receive them, and Bonnie followed him closely.

Eden regarded them both with secret surprise. The Squire in evening dress was a different being to the rough wood-cutter in shabby velveteens. His tall, massive figure looked, not only stately, but distinguished, and there was no lack of courtesy in his somewhat grave greeting; perhaps his shake of the hand was a little cold, but Eden had not expected cordiality.

Then, as her eyes fell on Bonnie, she almost gasped. Here the transformation was even more striking; for who would have identified Bonnie the hoyden, in her crumpled blue cambric, with an old deerstalker set rakishly on her tangled red locks, with my Lady Frivol, in her silk and

gewgaws, bridling her white neck, and fanning herself languidly, in her airy, girlish fashion?

"Good gracious!" muttered Mrs. Ferard, and her tone savoured of disgust. Bonnie heard her, and flirted her fan still more dexterously as she sailed away. Bonnie had worked her wicked will, and she looked strangely picturesque and pretty in her dainty gown of electric blue, with wonderful puffings of cloudy chiffon; but it would have been more suitable to a ball-room. Bonnie had not thought of that; her idea had been to dazzle and triumph, and to show her little world that she was grown up and knew how to dress.

She had pinned up her unruly locks, but there were still little waves and curls of hair over her forehead; her small and slighly embrowned hands were loaded with glittering rings; three handsome diamond stars were cunningly set in the corsage of her dress, a beautiful pendant of pearls and diamonds shone at her throat, and there were bangles on her wrists. Eden was told by Mrs. Ferard afterwards that the ornaments had belonged to Janet Redford, and that she had left them to Bonnie.

"But she has no right to wear them, the little

goose," she remarked angrily. "Fancy a child, not sixteen, wearing diamonds! Did you ever see such an absurd exhibition? Why, Lady Amabel, in her simple white silk frock, looked like a school-girl beside her." Then she added, still more indignantly: "Mr. Redford really ought not to allow it; a motherless girl like Bonnie—for to all intents and purposes she is motherless—ought to be properly guided and controlled. I gave him a bit of my mind this evening, and I am glad to say I made him uncomfortable. I told him it was a pity that Bonnie had inherited her mother's love of dress and finery. You should have seen how he glared at me, and how pale he turned when I said that; but I don't repent my speech one bit, though he pushed away his plate as though he had suddenly lost his appetite."

Eden was very sorry to hear this; but she could not wonder that Mrs. Ferard was provoked, for Bonnie had behaved abominably that evening. She turned a cold shoulder to her old friends, took no notice of Lady Amabel, and flirted—absolutely flirted—in the most audacious way with Philip Worsley, whom every one knew she detested.

As for Lord Joslyn, her old chum and prime

favourite, Eden could not discover that a word passed between them; Bonnie did not seem aware that he was in the room. Joslyn's tones grew more languid and slow as he conversed with Eden, who was his next neighbour. She noticed his bright, mocking glances following his young hostess.

As for Philip Worsley, he had dropped his old teasing ways, and seemed only bent on making himself agreeable—probably he admired electric blue and diamonds, and thought the wearer of the same merited his attentions; certainly, as the dinner progressed, the young barrister's dark head seemed always inclined towards Bonnie, and his anecdotes, his racy stories, his little tit-bits of fashionable intelligence, were all retailed for her benefit—and this alone was a triumph for Bonnie.

Bonnie, who read such strong disapproval in her friends' eyes, was not a bit repentant or ashamed of her childish behaviour; she was far too excited and pleased with herself. Philip Worsley had always treated her like a little girl; he had teased and laughed at her until she had longed to box his ears. She had actually held her hand behind her one evening, she had been in such a furious rage with him—that was hardly two years ago—and

now he was bending towards her, with an obsequious smirk on his handsome face, and not a spark of satirical fire in his eyes.

"You must really get your uncle to bring you to town, Miss Redford," he said, just before Bonnie gave the signal for the ladies to rise; "it is your bounden duty to see Daphne Chasmar in *The Enchantress*; she is simply divine. She made a decided hit in Inez, and it is now pretty generally allowed that she is one of our finest actresses—there is so much *chic* and *diablerie* about her; and then, she has such a splendid physique—one sees that in spite of rouge and pearl powder."

"Daphne Chasmar?—I have never heard of her. I must ask Uncle Alick to let me see her," returned Bonnie rather loudly. But at that moment the vicar, who was sitting opposite to Philip, trod rather heavily on his foot; the patent-leather shoe was somewhat tight, and Philip winced with pain.

"My wife is looking at you entreatingly, Bonnabel," observed Mr. Ferard quietly; and then Bonnie, with some reluctance, rose from her chair. She was loth to break off her conversa-

tion with Mr. Worsley; she wanted to continue the subject, to hear more about this wonderful Daphne Chasmar.

As Eden seated herself on the cushioned seat in the bay window, Lady Amabel joined her.

"May I talk to you a little?" she asked, in a sweet, winning voice. "I have heard so much of you from Joslyn." Then, as Eden smiled, well pleased, Lady Amabel sat down beside her.

Eden was already strongly prepossessed in her favour. Lady Amabel had a gentle, high-bred face. She was not exactly pretty, but her graceful figure and air of distinction, as well as a certain natural simplicity, were wonderfully attractive; and Eden certainly would not have endorsed Mrs. Ferard's petulant remark, "that she looked like a schoolgirl beside Bonnie." On the contrary, Bonnie resembled a flaunting little poppy beside a tall white lily. Lady Amabel was so white, and fair, and dainty.

Bonnie was at that moment skimming across the room like a bluebird, touching up flower-vases and re-arranging chairs. She had evidently no wish for a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Ferard, so she opened the piano and began playing a valse.

Lady Amabel broke off the conversation to listen for a moment, and then she said,—

"Is it not a pity, Miss Lloyd? and Joslyn says she is really such a nice girl. It is such bad form for a girl of her age to wear all that jewellery; and yet how pretty she looks! It is her colouring and bright eyes that are so striking, for her features are not really pretty."

"No, but she is wonderfully attractive," returned Eden. "Lady Amabel, I do so wish you and Bonnie were friends; she does so need friends to tell her things, and I am afraid she only quarrels with Mrs. Ferard when she speaks her mind."

"My dear Miss Lloyd, she would take nothing from me. Bonnie refuses to make friends with me; you see she has hardly spoken to me this evening. Well, that is because Joslyn offended her last night; he said that he could not ride with her to-morrow because he had promised to go with me to Elsenham, and that upset her. You see, Bonnie has been used to such a monopoly of Joslyn's attentions that she looks upon him as her own property."

"Oh, I see—naughty child—that is why she will not speak to him to-night." Then Lady

Amabel laughed, and the next minute the gentlemen came into the room. Mr. Worsley went straight to the piano, and a gay skirmish began between him and Bonnie. Mr. Redford and the vicar carried on the discussion on which they had been engaged in the dining-room, and Joslyn, after listening to them a moment, joined his sister and Eden.

"Worsley's got his innings to-night," he remarked with a grin. "What a conceited ass the fellow is! Why, he is going to sing—just like his cheek; and you and Miss Lloyd have not been invited to perform. My word! there's a pretty heavy score against my Lady Frivol. Never mind, Amabel; we'll pay her out. Good lack! if the Squire is not going to interfere! That's one for you, my child;" and then Mr. Redford's clear tones were distinctly audible.

"We shall be delighted to have a song from you presently, Worsley, but I think we ought to ask the ladies first. Lady Amabel, I know you sing, and I am sure Miss Lloyd will be good enough to accompany you. Bonnie, my dear, will you give Miss Lloyd your place?"

It was all done in a moment, without any fuss.

Philip Worsley looked a little crestfallen as he removed his piece of music, and Bonnie frowned and grew red.

"Please do not refuse," whispered Eden, as Lady Amabel naturally hesitated; "none of us want to hear Mr. Worsley, and Bonnie needs a lesson;" and then the Squire came forward and gave her his arm. But all the time she sang he stood on the rug, with his arm against the carved mantelpiece, and shielded his face with one hand; her clear, pure contralto voice ringing through the room seemed to penetrate to every heart.

CHAPTER XIII

A TRUTH-TELLER

"There is no man so friendless but what he can find a friend sincere enough to tell him disagreeable truths."—BULWER LYTTON.

"A friend is one who can finish your sentences for you."

EDEN had another surprise before the evening was over. It is the unexpected that always happens. The Dene carriage had just driven from the door, and the Ferards were preparing for their walk down the village, when the Squire took up his felt hat. "I will see you through the wood, Miss Lloyd," he said quietly to Eden. He spoke with the utmost coolness, as though he were an accredited squire of dames, and quite used to the minor courtesies of life.

Eden was so astonished that she almost lost her presence of mind. "Indeed, there is no need to trouble you, Mr. Redford," she said hurriedly; "I am not at all nervous." But he took no notice of this reply.

"YOU HAD BETTER TAKE MY ARM," OBSERVED MR. REDFORD QUIETLY.

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Mrs. Ferard gave her a wicked glance. "Who would have believed he could be so civil?" she whispered as she passed; while the vicar remarked pleasantly, "Never refuse a good offer, Miss Lloyd; it is rather dark under those firs, and there are a few awkward tree-stumps. I sprained my ankle one night taking a short cut to the village."

He was right. After all, Eden was glad of her escort. The wild garden was bathed in moonlight; but as they entered the little wood it was difficult to discern the path, and it would have been highly probable that, if she had been alone, she would have missed her way, and wandered into one of the side-paths that tended in all directions. Before she had taken many steps, she nearly tripped over a root.

"You had better take my arm," observed Mr. Redford quietly, "or you will be following the vicar's example. I know this wood so well that I could find my way blindfold through it."

Eden thanked him and took his advice, and for some time there was no further remark on either side. At last, when the silence was becoming a little oppressive, Eden said, "I have

quite fallen in love with Lady Amabel. She is a sweet girl; just my ideal of a young English woman—so perfectly natural, and so very gentle."

"Most people admire her," he replied; but he spoke without enthusiasm. "I am not surprised to hear that you agree with them: she and Bonnie are strong contrasts." He paused, and then continued, in rather an embarrassed voice, "Sheer honesty compels me to own that you were right in what you said yesterday about Bonnie. Undisciplined—that was the word you used. I am afraid my little girl did not quite hit it off to-night. I wish you would give me your unbiassed opinion, Miss Lloyd. In my time it was not usual for very young girls to wear jewellery. Bonnie was a bit too smart this evening. I somewhat liked Lady Amabel's style better."

Eden thought she detected anxiety in his voice.

"I agree with you, Mr. Redford," she returned simply. "Bonnie looked very pretty, but so much finery was hardly in good taste; if you will allow me to say so, I think it would be well for you to suggest that diamonds are unsuitable to a girl of her age."

"To be sure, they are most unsuitable," was the

quick reply. "But it is no use my saying so to Bonnie; she would hear me out, and then talk me over to her way of thinking, as she always does. She just argues and argues, till I give in from sheer fatigue. If I were to ask her to let me lock up her ornaments for a year or two, she would just cry her eyes out, and then we should both of us get upset. No, no; you or Mrs. Ferard must give her a hint. Women know best how to tackle a girl. Masculine fingers are too clumsy for that sort of work."

Eden suppressed a smile. She had lived long enough in the world to know that even good men are not always remarkable for moral courage in dealing with their womankind. She felt sorry for Mr. Redford, but she would not give up her opinion.

"No one else has such influence with Bonnie," she returned very seriously; "she is devoted to you. You must forgive me for saying that I think you are wrong."

"Perhaps so—perhaps so!" he replied good-humouredly; "but all the same, I must decline to bell the cat. I have no finesse; I blurt things out, and that sets my Lady Frivol's back up."

Then he changed the subject rather abruptly by asking her how she liked the Russells, and if they made her comfortable; and by the time Eden had answered the questions in a very satisfactory manner, the Log Hut was in sight, and Mr. Redford beat a hasty retreat.

It was not fated, however, that Eden should take the obnoxious *rôle* of mentor on that occasion: some one had been beforehand.

When she went across to Heatherwood the next morning, she met Lord Joslyn; he was whistling merrily, and seemed in excellent spirits. He stopped at once to wish her good-morning.

"The wind is in the east," he remarked blandly; "I advise you to take plenty of wraps." And as Eden seemed much puzzled by this, for the day was sultry and airless, he continued cheerfully, "It is a bit squally, don't you know, and the barometer is going down fast; I should not be surprised if you needed an umbrella." And then, saluting in military fashion, he departed, leaving her more mystified than ever.

When Eden opened the door of Bonnie's sitting-room, she thought that the room was empty, but the next moment she discovered the girl curled

up on the window-seat; her face was hidden in her arms, and she was sobbing in a heart-broken fashion.

Eden crossed the room quickly and sat down by her. "My dear child," she said, quite alarmed, "what has happened?" for she felt that this *abandon* of grief must point to some grave cause. After all, Mr. Redford must have been lecturing her, and this was the result.

"I hate him," broke out Bonnie angrily. "I never want to speak to him again. I don't care what Uncle Alick says, but I will not go near the Dene while that girl is there. Of course, she put him up to it, or he never would have said such things. He used to be so nice. I was so fond of him." And here Bonnie buried her face in her handkerchief.

A light began to dawn on Eden.

"Has Lord Joslyn been teasing you, dear? I met him just now, and he seemed very lively."

"Oh, no; he was dreadfully in earnest; he was not teasing at all—that is the worst of it; he meant every word he said. He was not a bit like himself. He quite frightened me when he came into the room, he looked so solemn; and

then he sat down like a judge, and asked why I had made such a ridiculous exhibition of myself last night with 'that cad Worsley';" and then Bonnie clenched her hands quite fiercely. "He actually had the impertinence to say that they were all laughing at me." Here the girl seemed so hysterical with emotion that Eden only stroked her hair in a caressing fashion, and said, "Never mind, dear, what he said," which was weak on her part; but Bonnie in tears was such a pathetic object that at that moment Eden was disposed to exonerate her feelings.

"Wasn't he a beast to tell me that to my face?" went on Bonnie; and actually Eden let this improper expression pass unreproved. "Of course, he knew that would hurt me more than anything; and then he pretended to be kind—the hypocrite—and said he was only speaking for my good, and that he thought friends ought to tell each other the truth. He said"—and here Bonnie's voice was very sad indeed—"that it quite pained him that his sister should see me behave in that ridiculous fashion, and that it was such bad form wearing all that jewellery; but, of course, it only showed my ignorance of the world, and that he had told

Amabel that I had lived in a little country place, and knew no better. Oh! how I longed to throw something at him! But he would only have said 'that throwing things was also bad form,' so I put my fingers in my ears at last, and would not listen to another word; after that he went away, and I heard him whistling." Then Bonnie broke down again; but this time her head was on Eden's shoulder, and her passionate, girlish heart poured out its wounded feelings in childish sobs and tears. "Undisciplined—I think that was your word," Eden could hear the Squire's deep tones saying. Bonnie had not yet learnt to restrain and control her emotions.

Eden quite understood why the pain was so unendurable. Bonnie valued Joslyn's good opinion immensely. In spite of his youth, he held the creed of his class; he was true to his caste: to be in good form or bad form was highest praise or most scathing condemnation.

A few simple words of censure from her favourite companion had opened Bonnie's eyes with a vengeance; she had been over-dressed, and vulgarly loaded with ornaments; she had shown the worst possible taste in neglecting her guests

and amusing herself with Mr. Worsley. Bonnie was still young and ingenuous enough to redden with shame at the idea of flirting, but her conscience would not allow her to deny it.

Great, then, was Bonnie's woe—genuine and deep her remorse!—to be a laughing-stock, when she had craved admiration; to be accused of want of refinement, when she had desired to show her knowledge of the world, and to air her finest manners. This was humiliation indeed; but perhaps the greatest sting lay in those words when Joslyn had remarked gently that he had been pained that his sister should have seen her to such disadvantage.

Wounded vanity and wounded self-love are hard to heal. Eden did not find it easy to comfort Bonnie for her girlish chagrin: she was very grateful for Eden's affectionate sympathy, but she still looked so woebegone and pale that Eden felt quite sorry for her.

"Listen to me, dear child," she said at last; "you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Do you suppose any of us can go through life without making mistakes? On the contrary, we learn our best lessons through bitter experience.

Last evening was a mistake, Bonnie. You made no end of blunders. You wanted to be grown up, and do as grown-up people do ; and, being young, you committed a few absurdities, and, of course, people made unpleasant remarks. Well, let it pass ; you will never be so foolish again. Don't let one failure dishearten you. Forgive Lord Joslyn for his plain speaking—he meant to be a good friend to you, I am sure of that ; and, above all, forgive yourself. We must not be too hard on ourselves for mere errors of judgment. If you will take my advice, you will let no one see how much upset you are ; be brave, and make up your mind to do differently in future, and to give no one the chance of laughing at you again."

This piece of advice was so sensible and bracing that it appealed to Bonnie's common-sense. After a time she dried her eyes and allowed herself to be comforted ; but there were no lessons done that morning. Bonnie had cried herself into a headache, and was only fit to lie down on the couch and have a nap.

Eden sat beside her until she had fallen asleep ; then she stole noiselessly out of the room, and went in search of Mrs. Pern. She was relieved

to hear from the housekeeper that Mr. Redford had ridden over to a distant farm, and would not be back to luncheon. Bonnie would wake refreshed by a sound nap, and have time to pull herself together before her uncle returned; and as she had plenty of spirit, she would probably take care that he should notice nothing.

As Eden walked through the wood, she was surprised to see Lord Joslyn seated on a tree-trunk, with his bicycle beside him. He was evidently waiting for her to pass, for he rose at once.

"Well," he asked, "was I a true prophet?"

Eden shook her head. "I found poor Bonnie dreadfully unhappy, and crying her eyes out. I felt quite sorry for the child."

The mocking light died out of Joslyn's eyes, and he looked grave.

"Yes, I know," he returned; "I was awfully sorry myself, but I was bound to tell her the truth. Why, that cad Worsley thought she was making up to him: there is no end to his cheek; he is the most conceited beggar I know. I never see him without longing to give him one for himself. He had no idea that it was only sheer

cussedness on Bonnie's part, for she hates him like poison."

"I am afraid we must all acknowledge that Bonnie behaved very foolishly last night."

"Didn't she just?" returned Lord Joslyn, in a disgusted tone; "it riled me like anything to see her fooling with that ass Worsley. My word," he went on, with boyish frankness, "I would not have minded half so much if Amabel had not been there. She has not said a word to me, but any one could see what she thought of Bonnie."

"I fancy Bonnie has taken her lesson to heart, Lord Joslyn. She is very young, but she will learn wisdom some day."

"I am sure I hope so"—rather dolefully. "Some one was bound to tell her, however; but I can't say I enjoyed the business. You see"—confidentially—"the Squire is such an old duffer; he gives in to her, and that's bad for a girl. I would not have put it quite so strongly if she had not talked a lot of rubbish: I did not want to hurt her." Lord Joslyn laughed, but he looked a little troubled, too, at the idea that his chum had taken his words so deeply to heart.

"Oh, she will soon get over it. Leave her to herself for a little, and it will all come right," said Eden, holding out her hand to him.

"Oh, I mean to give Heatherwood a clear berth for the present, until the wind is in another quarter." And then he went off, and Eden could hear him singing blithely :

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more;
Men are deceivers ever:
One foot on sea and one on shore,
To one thing constant never."

CHAPTER XIV

LADY MARGARET

"A light from far illumines her face; a light
That comes beyond the moon, beyond the sea.
The light of truth divine, the glorious hope
Of resurrection at the promised morn,
And the meeting which ne'er shall part again."

POLLOK.

EDEN wished that she had some excuse that would take her to Heatherwood that afternoon, for she was anxious to learn where Bonnie was; but the thought that her visit might be regarded in the light of an intrusion deterred her. If Mr. Redford had returned, Bonnie would certainly be with him, for, unless she was bicycling with Lord Joslyn, they were seldom apart. It was an unexpected pleasure then, when, just as she was sitting down to her solitary tea, she saw Bonnie emerge from the wood, with her black bodyguard beside her. She was walking very soberly, and still looked rather pale,

though she flushed a little at Eden's affectionate greeting.

"I cannot wait a minute; but Uncle Alick wanted you to see this;" and she laid an open note on the table. "He thinks we ought to go." It was from the Dene, and Eden read it rather eagerly. Lady Amabel had written at her grandmother's dictation. Lady Margaret was desirous of making Miss Lloyd's acquaintance, and would be glad if Bonnie would bring her to tea the following afternoon. If they liked, the carriage should be sent for them on its return from Elsenham.

"Uncle Alick would not agree to that," observed Bonnie, with a shade of her old manner. "He prefers to send us up himself, and I am glad of it. I suppose you will go, Eden? I wanted to refuse myself, but Uncle Alick seemed quite put out at the idea. You see, Lady Margaret and he are such cronies, and he never will let me refuse any invitations to the Dene. He goes himself at least once a week; so, if you do not object, I am afraid we must go."

"I shall be delighted to accept Lady Margaret's kind invitation," returned Eden quickly; and

indeed, it seemed a wonderful thing to her that her wish should be so soon gratified.

When Bonnie had left her, she sat at her work in an unusually contented frame of mind. "I am making friends already," she said to herself complacently. "Mrs. Ferard is becoming a real friend, and now I am to make Lady Margaret's acquaintance; and I think I am getting on better with Mr. Redford. Why, he actually asked my advice last night. Somehow, I am beginning to feel quite at home at Huntswood."

The following afternoon, as Eden crossed the wild garden, she saw a handsome barouche, with a pair of fine bays, waiting at the front door of Heatherwood, and the next minute Bonnie came to meet her. Bonnie, who had made a careful *toilette*, looked quite charming, and, though she had not recovered her usual spirits, was evidently trying to be cheerful, and to make the best of an irksome call.

"I suppose we shall play tennis or croquet, while you talk to Lady Margaret," she observed as they drove from the door. "We shall not have tea with her—she is such an invalid, you

know. As it is so hot, I expect we shall have it on the terrace."

To Eden this sounded delightful; she had a perfect passion for meals *al fresco*, and Bonnie shared this taste.

Eden had more than once passed the Dene; but the spacious garden in front, full of fine old trees, concealed the house from the eyes of any one passing by. Now the lodge gates were open, and they drove rapidly through the shrubbery to the old red Queen Anne mansion. The drawing-room, into which the butler ushered them, commanded a most enchanting view: a green lawn, shaded with old trees, stretched to a broad terrace; and beyond lay the Dene valley, three hundred feet below, with wonderful shadows crossing and re-crossing the broad belt of green; the steep sides of the valley, clothed with heather and bracken, with tangled masses of whortleberries, holly, and bramble-blossoms.

Eden was almost transfixed with admiration "It is like a green sea," she said. "Look at those violet shadows, Bonnie—how they move and deepen! What a dream of loveliness! And to think Lady Margaret cannot see it!"

"Is it not sad?" observed a quiet voice behind them; and Eden, turning in some confusion, saw a fair, gentle-looking woman, who held out her hand with a smile.

Miss Graham had long ago outlived her youth, but her middle age was not without its charms. She had an attractive, sympathetic face, that looked as though it had known trouble; and the grey eyes were a little sad.

"You were thinking of Lady Margaret's blindness," she said pleasantly. "That would naturally come into your mind as you looked at that view. I think few could love it as she did. She used to study its changes with never-ceasing pleasure, and it is now a delightful memory—when we tell her just how it looks, and how the shadows lie, she seems to see it all. Bonnie, dear, you will find Amabel and Joslyn in the hammocks; will you go to them while I take Miss Lloyd to the Cedar Room? Amabel has begged to have tea on the terrace, so I am going to tell Gaunt to take it there."

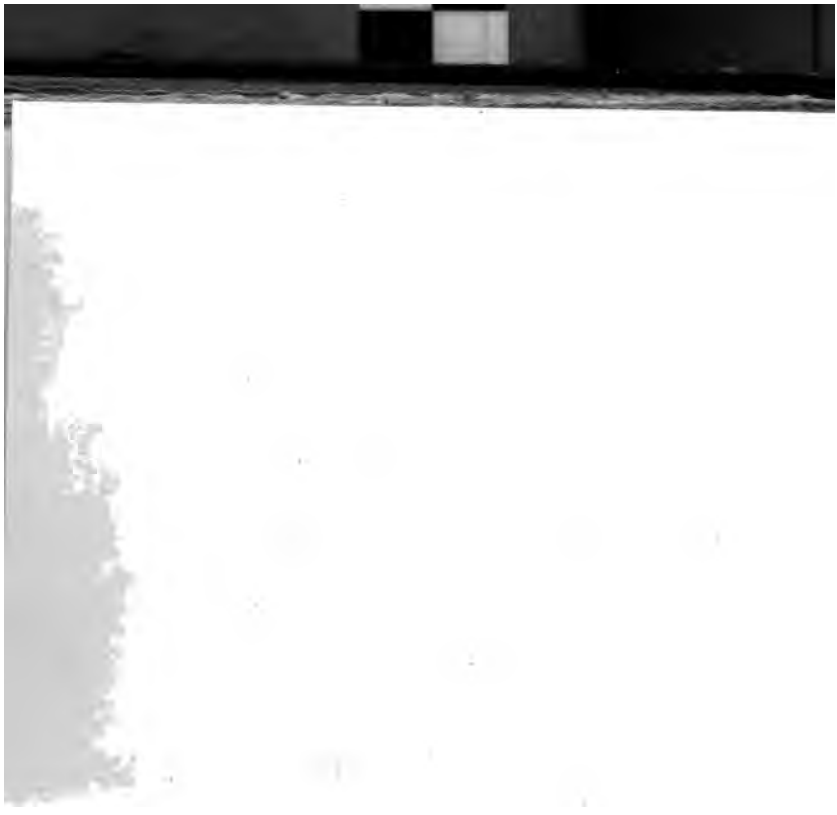
"Bonnie looks less blooming than usual," continued Miss Graham, as they crossed the wide hall. "She is a dear child, Miss Lloyd, is she

not? We are all so fond of her." She opened the door and motioned to Eden to enter. "When I think you have talked long enough, I will come and fetch you," she said with a smile, as she closed the door.

The Cedar Room—so called from its carved ceiling of cedar-wood—had always been Lady Margaret's favourite room before her blindness, and it was now reserved for her exclusive use. She was in her usual seat by the open window, and, as Eden advanced up the long room, she turned her face towards her with a welcoming smile.

"You will excuse my rising, Miss Lloyd; an old woman must have her infirmities, and getting up from my chair is rather a difficult process. Will you take that seat beside me?" Lady Margaret pointed to the spot with perfect accuracy, and with a wrinkled white hand that looked like pure ivory. "I am a little hard of hearing, my dear—not deaf, oh! no, certainly not deaf, only I like people to be near me; it troubles me when my visitors have to raise their voices;" and then she smoothed her satin gown a little tremulously.

SHE TURNED HER FACE TOWARDS HER WITH A WELCOMING SMILE.
[*Page* 184.



What a beautiful old face it was! Time and sickness and cruel trials had drawn deep lines on it, but the features were still finely chiselled. The sightless eyes were pathetic in their blankness; but there was nothing repellent in their blindness, and her whole appearance was so delicately feminine, her dress so dainty with the daintiness of refined and cultured life. Lady Margaret, who had been beautiful in her youth, was beautiful still in her old age, and knew it, and rejoiced in it in her simple, innocent fashion.

"I should hate to be plain, my dear," she once said to Mrs. Ferard. "Old as I am—and I was seventy-seven last birthday—I like to feel that people care to look at me. I used to tell Gerard," she went on—Gerard was her husband—"that one of the things to which I most looked forward in the future life was regaining youth. Fancy immortal youth, with the wisdom of age added to it!—how glorious that will be!" And Mrs. Ferard told the Squire afterwards that Lady Margaret's face seemed to shine with the thought.

People often said that they were sure Lady

Margaret was only partially blind, for she seemed to see everything. Eden, who was looking admiringly at the carved ebony cabinet, was rather taken aback when Lady Margaret quietly remarked,—

"You are admiring my ceiling and cabinet, Miss Lloyd; people always do. Oh, I am very proud of my drawing-room; it is a pleasant little world, is it not? Only it is rather limited. Do you know," she went on, with an old woman's garrulity; but her voice, though deep, was full of vibrating sweetness, "if any one had told me, when I was a happy young wife and mother, that I should ever sit here blind, widowed, and lonely, summer and winter, from year's end to year's end, I think I should have prayed to die in my youth."

"That sounds very sad, Lady Margaret."

"Say, rather, it sounds very foolish and faithless. I am no object for pity, I assure you. I live in my past and future; the present is nothing but a foot-bridge, that I am crawling over from day to day, and every hour I am nearer my dear ones." She dropped her voice almost into a whisper as she said this, as though she were con-

scious of silent auditors. Then she roused herself. "Oh, I have my blessings. You saw Miss Graham just now; well, she is my greatest comfort, and I love her as a daughter. Dear Ethel, she has known trouble, and hers is a reflective brightness, more moonshine than sunshine, only there is nothing cold about her. And then the poor Squire—he is a tower of strength to me; I often tell him so, but he never believes it. That is why I wanted to see you, my dear." And here the soft old hand touched her. "I am Alick Redford's oldest friend. He has had bitter trouble in his life, and it has soured him somewhat. He has to be father and mother too to that child Bonnie, and by all accounts she is a feckless creature: that is where he needs help. He wants a strong-hearted, sensible woman, who will take her in hand and teach her to behave like a young gentlewoman." Lady Margaret's face grew a little severe. "Amabel's account of last night rather vexed me; but I could not get Joslyn to say a word. I am afraid Bonnie behaved in rather a foolish fashion."

"I cannot deny that you are right, Lady Margaret," returned Eden gently; "but all the

same, I feel more hopeful about Bonnie. She is very much ashamed of herself, and I do not think that she will ever again behave in that childish way. Bonnie has plenty of common sense, and she is open to good influences."

"I am glad to hear you speak so kindly of the child, my dear Miss Lloyd. You see, poor Alick just idolises her, and, man-like, he hates to find fault with her, and so Bonnie just follows her own sweet will. That is why Mrs. Ferard and I persuaded him that she must have a governess. My dear, the matter is very close to my heart. I want Bonnie to be a real comfort to him. He has no one else and when I am gone he will be very lonely. You see how we all look to you, and how important your work is."

"You need not tell me that, Lady Margaret. I am very conscious, not only of my responsibilities, but also of my shortcomings."

"That is the right spirit. Well, well, I must not preach. I will only add that you and I must be good friends. You have a difficult task before you, my dear, and if I can help you in any way, I hope you will make use of me. Old women are fond of giving advice. Ah, here comes my dear

Ethel, to summon you to tea, and to tell me that I have talked long enough."

When Eden and Miss Graham reached the terrace, they found the three young people still in their hammocks; the first sound of their voices told Eden that harmony had been restored.

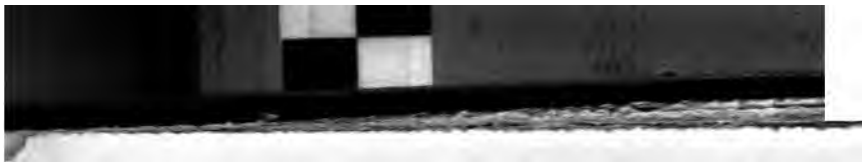
The tea-table was set a little lower down, where the view was most extensive; and as Eden gazed into the green heart of the valley and watched the climbing violet shadows, she thought of Lady Margaret, in her Cedar Room, living out her peaceful old age, and waiting patiently until her call came.

"It was like a sermon—it was better than any sermon," she said, half to herself.

She was rather surprised when Miss Graham answered the remark. "You were speaking of your visit to Lady Margaret, were you not? That was just my first impression; she has been a living sermon to me ever since I came to live with her. What a power personal influence is, Miss Lloyd!"

"It is indeed," returned Eden warmly. "A nature like Lady Margaret's seems to create its own peaceful atmosphere."

She would willingly have paced up and down the terrace listening to this intelligent and gentle woman, but a whistle from Lord Joslyn summoned them, and the next moment a blithe and most merry little party gathered round the tea-table.



CHAPTER XV

"THE QUEEN OF TRUMPS"

"Man, false man, smiling, destructive man."

THEODOSIUS.

"Thou humblest me: I am not in the vein."

King Richard III.

EDEN'S first visit to the Dene was only the prelude to many pleasant afternoons spent there.

Lady Margaret had taken a fancy to her. "Alick, my dear," she said the following day, when the Squire dropped in for a chat, "I congratulate you on securing such a governess for Bonnie. Ethel and I were quite charmed with Miss Lloyd yesterday, and you know we are both rather hard to please."

"My dear old friend"—in an incredulous voice, for the Squire was in one of his cynical moods—"surely this is rather a sudden liking on yours and Miss Graham's part." And to himself he said, "Even Lady Margaret is as impulsive as the rest of her sex."

"Sudden intuitions are sometimes best," returned Lady Margaret gently. "A face can deceive you, but a voice is generally a true index to character. Miss Lloyd has a sincere voice. I am sure she is sympathetic, but she is not weak; she is a womanly woman, but she has plenty of judgment: she is just the sort of person who would be helpful in trouble." And though the Squire marvelled secretly at this magnificent eulogy, he did not attempt to contradict it.

Lady Margaret was rarely wrong in her estimate of a character: her discrimination was at once fine and subtle; to be sincere, to be true, and to have a high standard of duty, were the highest virtues in her eyes.

"People are so little," she would say. "They aim low, and their ideal is low, too; they never try to make their lives as fine as possible. It is the day of small things."

Before many weeks were over a warm friendship had been cemented between Eden and Ethel Graham. They had much in common. Their tastes were similar, and they were both conscientious workers. Ethel Graham's life-story had been very sad; she had been an idolised

daughter, and an heiress, but a dishonest guardian had squandered her money. Before her parent's death she had been engaged. The connection was in every way desirable. Hugh Meredith was not only wealthy and well connected, but he was a true-hearted man, who could not fail to make a woman happy; and he loved Ethel with all his heart.

About a month before her wedding she sent for him. "Hugh," she said simply, "I am ruined. Mr. Metcalf has made away with my money, and I have only a few hundreds in the world. If you marry me, you will be marrying a pauper."

"Poor Ethel, I am very sorry, for your sake," he replied. "I should like to hang the swindling old rogue with my own hand. But cheer up, darling; I have enough for both;" and he refused to hear another word on the subject.

That night Ethel was too happy to sleep; but two days later Hugh wrote to put off some expedition they had planned—he had a sore throat, and was seedy. Alas! this was only the beginning of a serious illness, and before the

wedding day arrived Hugh Meredith was in his grave.

That was ten years ago ; but Ethel had not yet outlived her sorrow, though, to all appearance, she bore it calmly.

When, later on, she spoke of it to Eden, her voice was so full of pathos that Eden could not restrain her tears. "It was so cruelly hard," she said ; "it has spoilt your life so."

"It has saddened it," replied Ethel quietly. "We cannot go down with our beloved into the valley of the shadow of death, and remain our old selves. But I will not allow that my life is spoilt ; it is only changed and clouded."

"But you will never marry?" replied Eden sorrowfully ; for at heart she was as romantic as any girl.

"No, indeed ; one cannot marry twice ;" and Ethel smiled as she spoke. "I was married to Hugh already in every fibre of my heart and nature, and when he died I was most truly widowed. People do not understand this; but Lady Margaret does—that is our bond of union. Young as I am—only seven-and-thirty, and that is hardly middle age—I live, like Lady Margaret,

in my past and future. I am in my wilderness now, but my Canaan, like hers, is beyond the river."

It was a noble friendship that grew up between these two honest natures, and it enriched both their lives. "Indeed," Eden often said, "it was one of the good things that had fallen to her share, and which made her bless the day she came to Huntsmoor." Eden saw a great deal, too, of Lady Amabel, for Bonnie no longer tried to shirk her visits; but there was never any real intimacy between the girls—"it was just armed neutrality," as Lord Joslyn once remarked. Bonnie was civil and hospitable, but it was evident to all concerned that her invitations were considered in the light of duties.

Bonnie was not a bit sorry in her heart when Lady Amabel's visit ended; but when Lord Joslyn went up to Oxford in October, she seemed quite lost and forlorn, and was so lugubrious, not to say tragic, on the evening before his departure that Lord Joslyn offered to fetch his banjo, that he might sing an appropriate dirge—indeed, he requested Eden to play a few opening bars of the "Dead March in *Saul*"; and when she

declined, he played them himself, as a sort of prelude to his mournful ditty:

"Oh, call my Joslyn back to me,
I cannot bike alone,
The winter comes with frost and spree—
Where has that duffer gone?"

And then he buried his face in the banjo and wept loudly, wiping his eyes with his cuff, and would have begun another verse; but Bonnie, who was hurt in her tenderest feeling, told him very testily to shut up and go home.

"For when one is really unhappy," she explained afterwards to Eden, "it makes them just mad to be laughed at—it is like putting mustard on a sore place. Joslyn is in high spirits because he is going to Christ Church. He won't miss me a bit, but I shall miss him every hour of the day;" and poor Bonnie's voice was decidedly choky.

Eden thought she should miss the boy too, she had grown so fond of him. "Lord Joslyn," she said to him the next morning, while he was waiting to say good-bye to Bonnie, "do you know I feel very grateful to you." Then, as he looked puzzled, she continued, "You and Lady Amabel have done Bonnie so much good."

"Oh, come now, none of that," said Lord Joslyn, looking highly gratified.

"My dear boy, I really mean it." Eden was quite motherly. "It was so much easier for Bonnie to take your hints; she thinks so much of your opinion. Now, the other night, how well she behaved! That was because you had told her a few home-truths. Oh, she will be a spendid woman some day, and then we will all take credit to ourselves."

The evening to which Eden alluded, when Bonnie had earned her laurels, was a social evening spent at the Retreat as a sort of farewell party in honour of Lady Amabel and her brother. Ethel Graham accompanied them, but Mr. Redford had excused himself. To their surprise, and also to their disgust, they found Philip Worsley in the drawing-room. It struck Eden that Mrs. Ferard looked somewhat discomposed.

"Philip has stolen a march on us," she said, in a piqued voice. "I tell him he is a fit claimant for the casual ward. Fancy taking us by surprise in this way! Only a telegram half an hour ago; we are getting too old for this sort of thing, and he must really learn better ways."

"I know Aunt Gatty's blankets are always aired," remarked Philip, in an easy manner. Then, in a confidential aside to Bonnie, "I was determined to come down again. I give you my word, Miss Redford, that it was difficult to keep away. I am a sociable sort of fellow, and as I sat in my lonely chambers in Lincoln's Inn, I could not help thinking of that delightful evening at Heatherwood. Oh, I am not one to pay compliments; when I say a thing I mean it, and I never spent a happier evening in my life."

"I am very glad to hear it," returned Bonnie coldly. For one moment the old Adam had been aroused within her, for one moment she had weakly regretted that the blue dress Mr. Worsley had so admired was hanging up in her wardrobe.

Bonnie's appearance was almost Arcadian in its simplicity: a white frock, embroidered like a christening-robe, almost baby-like with its soft ruffles: not a bracelet, not even a necklace, only a knot of pink rose-buds. The round, girlish throat, so soft and pretty, was guileless of ornament.

"My Lady Frivol looks stunning," was Joslyn's

remark to his sister; and Lady Amabel smiled acquiescence.

"Bonnie looks very nice," she said cordially. "She is not really pretty, but she is so fresh and bright, and full of life. That white frock makes her look like a child."

"I am sorry to miss my bluebird," whispered Philip, in a tone so ingratiating that it was almost caressing. "You were determined not to dazzle our eyes to-night. Well, contrasts are effective sometimes, and there is something very *chic* and innocent in white, don't you know."

This compliment was in very questionable taste, and Bonnie, young as she was, felt repelled by it. In her own mind she had rapidly arrived at a decision. Joslyn had declared that Philip Worsley was a cad; therefore—and this was a foregone conclusion—Philip Worsley must be shunted for good and all.

She tried to shake him off now, and to turn a cold shoulder to him; but it was not easy to snub Mr. Worsley. He had too much self-assurance; he was so cock-sure of himself that it was impossible for him to credit the fact that his attentions failed to please. So he cheerfully

ignored Bonnie's chilling responses, and took in good part her curt, snapping remarks, and stuck to her with the tenacity of a leech. If any one could have read his secret thoughts, they would have been much as follows:

"What a joke for a man of my standing to be trying to please a little bread-and-butter miss, just out of the schoolroom! But there is something rather fetching about the chit, and in a year or two she won't turn out so badly. You might do worse, Master Philip; the Squire will not marry now, and my Lady Frivol, as they call her, is his only relative. It is the 'early bird that picks up the fattest worm'; and a little civility, not to say blarney, may serve my purpose hereafter." And here Philip adjusted his eye-glass, and settled himself in an easy attitude for further conversation.

He had an idea in his head—it had come to him as an inspiration: why should he not have a luncheon-party in his rooms?—Aunt Gatty and Bonnabel, and perhaps Miss Lloyd. He would ask his chum Robertson to assist him in entertaining the ladies; there was the Chrysanthemum Show at the Temple; they could have afternoon tea, and then he would escort them to the station.

Women liked this sort of impromptu entertainment, and it would not cost much—just the claret and some sweets, and a few flowers—for Philip was as canny as a Scotchman, and did not launch into unnecessary expenses. "Phil never spends a penny on other people if he can help it," his uncle once observed, in rather a scathing manner; "he likes snug investments and compound interest."

Bonnie was by this time telegraphing to Joslyn for assistance; but he did not appear to understand her signals. Joslyn could be dense when he chose. "*Noblesse oblige*," he muttered to himself; "one can't interfere with another fellow's innings, even if he be a cad; Bonnie must get out of the hole as she best can. My word, if she isn't going to leave him!—there, she is getting up from her seat—she has clean bolted; but the fellow is smiling as amiably as possible."

"Will you excuse me?" Bonnie had said hurriedly. "I have never given Uncle Alick's message to Gatty;" and then she darted across the room to Mrs. Ferard and Miss Graham.

It was evident that Philip had expected her to return to him. He sat for some time quietly con-

solidating his scheme; then he leisurely followed her. But Bonnie was not to be drawn into any more private conversation. She was talking to Ethel, and refused to be disturbed. "Why do you not make yourself pleasant to Lady Amabel?" she said pertly. "She is the greatest stranger here, and you have not spoken to her."

It was some time before Philip found out that he was being snubbed. Bonnie was positively rude before he fairly realised the situation; then his wrath was excessive.

"To be set down—admonished—reproved, by a chit not sixteen! He, Philip Worsley—a man of the world—a barrister!" Philip's handsome lips curled cynically, and an unpleasant look came to his eyes.

The remainder of the evening he attached himself to Ethel Graham. He discussed altruism, and the fate of the submerged tenth, in a voice that was clear enough to be audible to the rest of the room. He had a great deal to say on the emigration question, and the tracts of virgin lands still unappropriated in our colonies. Ethel Graham, who had never liked him, was obliged to confess that his talk was both clever and interesting.

He did not address Bonnie again, and never went near Lady Amabel. When the party broke up, he was affable and solicitous for Miss Graham's comfort. He put her and Lady Amabel into the carriage; to Bonnie he merely bowed, with a stiffness, a *hauteur*, that made her nearly burst out laughing in his face.

Bonnie was in high spirits—Joslyn had pronounced a singular benediction over her. "You have turned up trumps to-night," he said solemnly, "and were boss of the whole show. Bless you, my child, and frustrate his knavish tricks—the Queen of Trumps for ever!"

CHAPTER XVI

A VISITOR AT THE LOG HUT

Page: Madam, there is a lady in your hall
Who begs to be admitted to your presence.
Lady: Is it not one of our invited friends?
Page: No; far unlike to them. It is a stranger.
BAILLIE.

EDEN's acquaintance with the Squire still remained on the same unsatisfactory footing; there was no further invitation to dine at Heatherwood, and though she spent most of her afternoons with Bonnie, bicycling or playing tennis, he never joined them.

Afternoon tea was always served in Bonnie's *boudoir*; but, from all appearances, Mr. Redford never entered the room. Eden once hazarded the question.

"Oh no, Uncle Alick never comes here," Bonnie had returned, with her usual frankness. "He used to have tea here when Aunt Janie was alive, but now he prefers to have it in the library.

Mrs. Pern always sends him a cup. You see, this room makes him feel dull—all Aunt Janie's things are about, and he did so miss her."

Eden would have been a little sore on the subject of the Squire's unsociability, only every now and then she had proofs that he had by no means forgotten her existence. A pheasant or brace of partridges would be delivered at the Log Hut with Mr. Redford's compliments, or a basket of fine grapes or rosy-cheeked apples.

When Eden received her first gift, she wrote the prettiest little note of thanks; but on Bonnie bringing the grapes a few days later, she said rather hurriedly,—

"Of course they are from Uncle Alick; but you need not take any notice—he does so hate to be thanked, and notes fuss him; he just likes to do kind things, but it worries him if people are too grateful." And after this decided rebuff Eden wrote no more prettily worded notes.

One day Bonnie brought her a message that made Eden colour with pleasure. "Oh, Eden, I nearly forgot to deliver Uncle Alick's message," she exclaimed impetuously as Eden was giving her a French lesson. "He says that when he is

out you are quite welcome to go into the library and help yourself to as many books as you like, only you must write the names on a slip of paper and put it on his desk, and you must be sure to put them back in their right places. Uncle Alick is so particular about his books." Eden, who was a great reader, took full advantage of this permission, for it was a privilege she much valued.

On another occasion Bonnie handed her a pretty little lantern. "That is for you," she said briefly. "Uncle Alick says it is not safe for you to cross the wood now the afternoons are so dark." Eden felt quite touched at this fresh mark of thoughtfulness. Eccentric and unapproachable as he was, Mr. Redford clearly recognised that he was responsible for her comfort and safety, and the chivalrous nature of the man pleased her.

So she was very grateful, and tried not to feel hurt when she crossed his path and he did not stop to speak to her. "Not at home to strangers" seemed clearly written on his moody brow.

Once she came upon him suddenly in a little clearing; he was felling a tree, and she paused for a moment to watch him. The muscular arm, the

strong, even strokes of the axe, seemed to rivet her ; the massive figure, in relief against the slanting sunbeams, and the iron grey head, lingered long in her memory. What a grand settler he would have made ! she thought, clearing his own land and building his log hut in some Canadian forest ; but as he turned round and caught sight of her, Eden grew red and hurried on, as though she had committed some fault.

Sometimes, as she sat in her solitary parlour, she would hear him wrangling good-naturedly with Susan in the yard. There was no lack of humour in his voice, and they both seemed on excellent terms with each other. Sometimes George would chime in with his slow laugh. Eden never dared to join the little group—she knew too well the Squire would have made off at once.

"He is in a rare mood," Susan said one afternoon, as she brought in the tea-things. "George and me have nearly died with laughing. I always do say that the Squire is the best of company when you get him on the right track. But there, you are sitting in the dark, Miss Lloyd. I will fetch one of those pine-logs the Squire has been sawing ; it will make a fine blaze." And indeed,

as Eden sat sipping her tea, the little parlour seemed illuminated with the ruddy light.

Eden would never allow that she was dull; but when November came, with its shortening days and long, solitary evenings, she laid in a goodly store of books and work-materials.

"I have made out a sort of programme for my evenings," she said to Ethel Graham, when the latter was paying one of her rare visits to the Log Hut.

It was a dreary, sunless afternoon—one of those grey days peculiar to November. As they sat by the low cottage window, looking out at the bare, black firs and heaps of sodden leaves, Ethel shivered at the prospect, and marvelled at Eden's cheerfulness. "You see," continued Eden brightly, "I am generally back by five, and, as I seldom go to bed before ten, there are a good many hours to fill; so, as I said before, I have drawn up a sort of programme for the evening."

Ethel looked amused. "I had no idea you were so methodical. Will you let me hear your programme?"

"Well, after tea I read a stiff book for at least an hour. I am in the third volume of Carlyle's

'Frederick the Great' now, and after that I mean to take up the period of the Renaissance and study it thoroughly; then I either write a long letter to my brother or one of my nieces, or I settle to needlework. I am making countless warm garments for the poor of my brother's parish. I always send a big parcel at Christmas or the New Year. While I work, I make a sort of mental analysis of my reading, and try to digest it, or, if I am not in an industrious humour, I let my thoughts drift. With the supper-tray, I open my novel. I am going to re-read some of my old favourites—'Adam Bede' and 'Two Years Ago.' There are no modern novels in Mr. Redford's bookshelves, but he has all the old standard authors."

"I think I can help you there," interrupted Ethel eagerly. "You know, we have a box from Mudie's, and I could let you have as many novels as you care to read; it is a pity for you not to keep up with the current literature of the day."

"I agree with you," replied Eden; "and I will certainly not refuse so good an offer."

"Very well, then; you must come up to the Dene to-morrow and make your selection. Now

I must go—good-bye, dear. I really think you are the most healthy-minded person I ever knew; I was saying so to Lady Margaret last night;" and Ethel went off smiling.

"How does the programme answer?" was her first question when Eden came up to the Dene a week later to exchange her book for a fresh one.

"Excellently," was Eden's reply. "Do you know, dear, I am afraid I am beginning to love my solitude too much. When I have groped my way through the little wood, it is so delicious to see the firelight streaming from my parlour window; and then, when I open the door, there is Susan, with her bright welcome, and my kitten Scrap—he is my own kitten, you know—purring with uplifted tail; and when I have put myself tidy, I find the lamp lighted and my books ready. And time passes so quickly that I am always surprised when the supper-tray comes in and my play-hours begin. But I am afraid I must make a confession; my novel was so engrossing last night that I stayed up to finish it, and it was half-past eleven before I wished Scrap good-night."

It was almost a wonder to Eden herself that

she was so contented in her hermitage, for in winter the Log Hut was certainly not a cheerful abode. George did his best to keep the woodland paths well swept, but on rainy days the wet grass and slush were not inviting. Eden took Susan's advice by-and-bye, and provided herself with a pair of strong clogs; and Bonnie lent her an old mackintosh cloak and hood.

"It will keep you dry," she observed. "You look rather like one of Macbeth's witches; but no one will see you, so that does not matter."

Towards the close of November Eden set out one evening for the Log Hut rather earlier than usual. Bonnie and her uncle were going to have tea at the Dene. Eden had some idea of going to the Retreat. She was not the least afraid of the dark walk through the woodland at this hour, and she knew that Mr. Ferard would walk part of the way back with her. She had a free afternoon so seldom now. Bonnie was working for a bazaar, and needed her help, and they spent most of their afternoon working and talking in the *boudoir*.

It was just a passing craze on Bonnie's part, and would not last long, so Eden cheerfully gave up

her much-needed exercise, and cut out and devised all kinds of pretty trifles, for she was a skilful workwoman, and had excellent taste.

It was so early in the afternoon that she had not needed to light her lantern ; but the rawness of the atmosphere and the faint smell from decaying vegetation and rotting leaves made her walk unpleasant, and, as usual, she hailed the sight of her cottage-window with the firelight playing on it. To her surprise, she saw Susan standing in the porch, as though she was watching for her, and she quickened her steps at once.

"Is any one wanting me, Susan ?"

"Well, yes, Miss Lloyd, and that is why I am glad you are so early, though the lady did not seem to be much in a hurry. She is a stranger in the place, and I have never set eyes on her ; but she has not told me her name ; she said her business was with Miss Lloyd, and that she would sit by the fire until you came back."

A stranger to Susan ! Could it be Rosamond taking her by surprise ? Rosamond did impulsive things sometimes. Eden's pulse quickened a little as she opened the door, but her first glance showed her that her visitor was unknown to her.

The lady—for it was a lady—threw back her velvet-and-sable mantle and rose hastily. She was a singularly graceful-looking woman, dressed richly and in good taste.

"You will forgive the intrusion of a stranger," she said, in a voice that was remarkably clear and sweet. The firelight played full upon her face, and Eden saw that she was not young; she was extremely handsome, but looked worn, and there were deep hollows in the temples.

"I told the good woman who admitted me," she went on, in an easy, unabashed voice, "that I was in no hurry, and could wait for you. I did not wish to give her my name, because those sort of people chatter so, and my business is important and confidential."

She gave a little laugh as she said this, that grated on Eden's ear.

"May I sit down again? I am an invalid, though, perhaps, I do not look one; and it is easier to converse when one is comfortable."

She sank down as she spoke with an air of weariness that was certainly genuine, and the sable-trimmed cloak fell in regal folds round her.

Perplexed as Eden felt, she could not help

admiring the unstudied grace of her attitude as she leant back against the fur.

"I have no objection to telling you my name," she went on lightly. "I am Mrs. Redford—Mrs. Cecil Redford, I suppose I ought to say, though I believe my respected brother-in-law has not taken to himself a wife."

If a bomb had exploded in the room Eden could hardly have been more dismayed.

"You are Mrs. Cecil Redford!" she almost gasped. "Then why are you here? What business can you have with me?"

Mrs. Redford took off her gloves; the room was warm, and she liked to be comfortable. The thin, white hands, blazing with brilliants, looked very effective against the dark fur.

"My dear Miss Lloyd," she exclaimed, with another little tinkle of a laugh, "that was quite dramatic. Why am I here?—why, to do a little piece of business, which I am going to explain to you. In the first place, perhaps you may be aware that I am Bonnabel's mother?"

"I am most certainly aware of the fact!"

"Dramatic again! My dear lady, your *rôle* is most certainly tragedy! As you seem acquainted

with my name—and possibly know something of my story—you are no doubt aware that I am also Daphne Chasmar?"—and here she drew herself up proudly. "'The Stage Queen with the golden voice,' that is what they have been good enough to call me. *Mon Dieu*, what a life it is! I, Madelon Redford, can say with Cæsar, 'I came, I saw, I conquered,'—yes, conquered, for the world was at my feet."

"You have not come here to tell me this," returned Eden, in a chilling manner—stage queens were out of place in her little parlour. Madelon smiled in rather an unpleasant manner.

"I have come to tell my business, and to tell it in my own way. A little bird informed me the other day that my respected brother-in-law had secured an excellent governess for Bonnabel, and that she was lodged in the Log Hut in the wood. It is a charming retreat, but a trifle dull—a sort of place where one could read Hervey's 'Meditations among the Tombs.' Well, Miss Lloyd, when I heard this, I determined to pay you a visit. My brother-in-law and I are not on good terms; we do not think alike on any subject. It is useless for me to go to Heatherwood; it would

only provoke a scene. I want you to ask Bonnabel down here, so that I can see her."

As Madelon made this audacious request, the restless, brilliant eyes were fixed almost threateningly on Eden's face.

CHAPTER XVII

EDEN SENDS FOR THE SQUIRE

"It is best to be cautious and avoid extremes."

PLUTARCH.

FOR a few moments Eden remained silent—sheer perplexity and embarrassment deprived her of words; when she spoke, it was only in feeble reiteration.

"You want me to bring Bonnabel here?"

But her tone was so eloquent of meaning that an angry flush came to Madelon's face.

"Those were my words," she returned haughtily. "There is nothing in such a simple request to justify such excessive surprise. You are a paid dependent of the house of Redford; my daughter is in your charge; you are therefore the proper person to bring her to me. I have already explained to you that the situation between Mr. Redford and myself is rather strained; we have no liking for each other; indeed,

I might use a stronger word. It is far better for me to arrange matters with Bonnabel's governess." She spoke with *hauteur*; but Eden, who had plenty of moral courage, was not to be coerced.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Redford, if I say frankly that I must decline taking any part in this matter. I am responsible to Mr. Redford, and I could not act in such an underhand fashion." Then she added coldly, "I am quite aware of your position with regard to your daughter—that you are a perfect stranger to her, and that it is Mr. Redford's wish that you and Bonnie should be kept apart. You will pardon my mentioning this, but I could not allow you to think that I am ignorant of these matters."

"Oh, you are in my brother-law's confidence, are you?" sneered Madelon. "You decline helping me? But I must tell you I have set my heart on this, and I am not to be so easily baffled. I have a strong will, and I am never turned from my purpose. I have not seen Bonnie since she was four or five. Why, the little monkey must be nearly sixteen now. She used to be like Cecil, and I am curious to know if the likeness still holds good. I shall certainly not

leave Huntsmoor until I have fulfilled my purpose. If you will not help me, Miss Lloyd, I am strong enough to do without you; but neither you"—in a withering tone—"nor my precious brother-in-law can prevent my seeing my own child."

Eden gazed at her bewildered. Was this play-acting, or a desire to torment her old enemy? Her dislike to the woman increased every moment, and yet, in her inner consciousness, she felt sure that Madelon was in earnest. If so, why had she been contented all these years without seeing her child's face? What did this sudden maternal interest mean? Human nature is very complex and many-sided, and even a human butterfly like Madelon may not be wholly devoid of natural feeling; and though Eden was determined not to yield, or to be in any way the tool of a designing woman, yet when she next spoke her tone was gentle.

"I hope you will think better of it, for Bonnie's sake," she said pleadingly; "the child is so happy. Why should you bring unnecessary complications into her young life? It would be far better for you to go away. You have much to lose and little to gain by an interview with her."

Eden was trying to use the same weapons as her adversary; but Madelon only laughed scornfully.

"You mean that I should lose the allowance that Alick Redford has paid me through his lawyer all these years? Do you suppose I care for his beggarly pittance?" Her brow darkened with anger. "I have taken it because it served my purpose; but I am rich enough to do without it. Do you suppose Daphne Chasmar has not feathered her nest? Why"—with a splendid gesture, that might have become an empress—"if I had chosen, I could have been a countess. *Mon dieu!* yes. The young fool was infatuated; but I had had enough of matrimony. Husbands are so *ennuyant* and tyrannical; and he was so young—and so imbecile. No, I could not stoop to it. The real temptation would have been to change my name—to be Madelon Redford no longer; but that would have pleased Alick. So I shall keep it—keep it to my dying day." Here she winced suddenly, as though in pain, and sank back against her furs, while a faint grey tinge showed under her pale olive skin.

"I am afraid you are ill," observed Eden, rising from her chair.

But Madelon waved her back. "It is nothing; I am used to pain. But you are right; I am ill. Did you not see in the paper that Daphne Chasmar was about to retire from the stage? Well, that is true. The doctor says the life is killing me by inches, so I am going abroad to rest." She spoke wearily, in the tone of a person who had nothing to hope and nothing to fear.

Eden looked at her in sudden pity. "I am very sorry to hear this. This is why you wish to see Bonnie."

But already Madelon's humour had changed, and her voice had its light, mocking tone again.

"Oh, there is no need to sentimentalise. I am a very practical person—hard as nails. It is just curiosity on my part to see my red-headed little monkey again."

But Eden did not believe her. "Are you staying here?" she asked presently.

"Yes, I have a lodging at Hencotes. Do you know that white house near the temporary church —Rookwood Cottage? It is tolerably comfortable, and the people are civil; and I have my maid

with me. The hotel at Elsenham was too far off for my purpose."

Eden caught her breath with dismay. She knew Rookwood Cottage well; it adjoined the Hermitage, and it overlooked the Ferards' garden. Madelon had actually settled herself in their very midst.

"Well," continued Mrs. Redford, coolly fastening her cloak, "I have not gained much by my visit; but I shall come again. The little bird I mentioned will keep me informed of your and Bonnie's movements, and before many days we shall meet. Good evening, Miss Lloyd. You are a model of propriety. I really must congratulate Alick, when I see him, on the treasure he has found." Here she bowed airily.

"Do you mean that you are walking to Hencotes in the dark?" exclaimed Eden.

Then Madelon gave another little ringing laugh. "I walk! Thank you, no! I have my carriage and my maid waiting for me at the gate." And then she passed out of the room with a graceful swing of her draperies, leaving Eden in a state of anxiety that baffled description.

"I suppose the lady was a friend of yours, she

stayed so long?" asked Susan curiously, as she brought in the kettle.

"Indeed, she was not," returned Eden hastily. "I never saw her before. She only came on business."

"Well, she is coming again," retorted Susan, rather disappointed at her lodger's reticence. "She told George so, when he lighted her to the gate; and she's stopping at Hencotes, for he heard her tell the coachman to drive to Rookwood Cottage. It was her own carriage, too; and it is put up at the King's Arms, for George saw it turn out of the yard this afternoon. Well, she is a terribly fine woman, and no mistake; and I should think that cloak could not have cost less than a hundred guineas. Poor Miss Janet had one very like it, and I know that was what she paid for it."

"Miss Janet? Oh! you mean Mr. Redford's sister." But Eden's tone gave so little encouragement that Susan speedily retired. She was in no mood for garrulous talk. What was she to do? How was she to see Mr. Redford and warn him of Madelon's proximity? These were the questions she asked herself as she drank her tea.

It was necessary for her to explain things to him, and it would be better for him to come up to the Log Hut. As soon as she had made up her mind on this point, she got out her writing-case and wrote a few lines:

"Dear Mr. Redford,—I have something important to tell you, and there is no time to be lost. Will you come down to me this evening? Please say nothing to Bonnie.

"Yours truly,

"E. Lloyd."

And when she had finished, she put on a warm cloak, lighted her lantern, and set off to Heatherwood.

As she expected, they had not returned from the Dene, so she handed the note to the butler. "Will you kindly put this on Mr. Redford's desk in the library? I believe he always goes in after dinner, and then he will see it."

"Certainly, miss!" returned the man civilly. "Yes, master always has his cigar there after his dinner while Miss Bonnie practises her music." And as Eden was well aware of the fact, she felt sure that the note would reach him.

Dinner at Heatherwood was always at half-past seven. She would order her supper for the same hour, and then there would be no interruption.

She took a hasty repast ; and when Susan came to remove the tray, the good creature grumbled audibly over her want of appetite.

"You have fed like a moulting sparrow, Miss Lloyd," she said, in an injured tone ; "and the cutlet was done to a turn. The night's frosty, too, and mighty chill, as George says ; so I shall warm you up a nice bowl of bread-and-milk at bed-time for a night-cap" And Eden did not refuse this kindly offer.

Susan swept up the hearth and threw on another fine log ; then she turned up the lamp and withdrew. The little parlour looked bright and cosy, but for once Eden failed to enjoy its comfort. She took up her knitting, laid it down, and then walked restlessly about the room ; it was impossible to settle to anything with this trying interview before her. It was about a quarter past eight ; in another half-hour she would expect him. But it was long before the half-hour expired when she heard hasty footsteps crunching the dead leaves and bracken.

Eden sat down and took up her knitting, but her hands trembled; for once in her life she was distinctly nervous. She heard the door unlatch, then there was a quick tap, and the next moment Mr. Redford stood on the threshold in his Inverness cape, his massive figure almost blocking up the tiny room.

"Well," he said abruptly, without any form of greeting, "What is it? why have you sent for me like this?" He looked at her keenly as he spoke; then he threw off his heavy cape, and approached the fire.

"I was obliged to send for you," returned Eden, in an apologetic voice; "I had no choice in the matter. Mr. Redford, will you take that chair?"—for he seemed to tower over her as he stood on the rug. "There is a good deal to explain. The business is not mine; it concerns you and Bonnie."

A frown of anxiety crossed his brow, but he sat down without a word.

"I have had a visitor this afternoon," she continued; "she was waiting for me here when I returned from Heatherwood. She was a stranger to both Susan and myself. When she told me

her name, I was greatly embarrassed—she was Mrs. Cecil Redford."

"Good God!" exclaimed the Squire; and Eden saw that his face had grown suddenly pale. "Madelon here, in this very room?"

"She was sitting where you are now, and she was here a long time. Do you wish me to tell you all that passed between us?"

He nodded vehemently.

"Everything, every word. Do not keep a thing to yourself."

As Eden began to tell her story, he put his elbow on the table, and shaded his face with his hand. He did not say a single word until she had finished.

"Is that all? Are you sure you have forgotten nothing?" he asked curtly, almost sternly, when the tale was ended.

"Yes, I have told you all; I have not omitted a single word."

"And she is at Rookwood Cottage? She intends to remain there?"

"I believe so. She gave me the distinct impression that she would not leave Hencotes until she had attained her purpose."

"She has broken her bond," he returned harshly. "I will write to my lawyer to-morrow: her allowance shall be stopped from this hour." He got up excitedly, and began to pace the room as he spoke. "She is false to the core; she has perjured her word; for she bound herself solemnly never to come within ten miles of Huntsmoor. But she shall not go unpunished; she shall spend my money no longer."

"Mr. Redford, may I say something? I am quite sure, from what Mrs. Cecil Redford said, that she is quite prepared for this. She spoke of her allowance with the utmost indifference, and told me that she was rich. I do not think that consideration—the probable loss of income—troubles her in the least. Her manner convinced me that for some reason she was in earnest, and that she really desired to see her child. She is evidently ill—no one could see her and doubt that fact. It is not for me to judge; but she is no longer young, and perhaps her life is lonely."

Then a smile of incredulity came to Mr. Redford's lips.

"No, you are right; it is not possible for you to judge," he returned, in a sarcastic voice; "but

on the whole you did excellently, and you were right—most certainly you were right—to send for me. Now will you let me think over matters quietly? and then we will put our heads together and plan what is to be done. Eden took up her knitting again; the Squire turned his face to the fire, and, crossing his arms under his head, stared silently at the flames, while only the ticking of the little clock on the mantelpiece broke the silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

GATHERING CLOUDS OVER HEATHERWOOD

"Much talking leads to exhaustion: therefore he who is wise knows when to stop."—*Eastern saying.*

It was a singular situation! As the long minutes succeeded each other, the silence grew almost oppressive; then the log spluttered and crackled, and a shower of bright sparks fell noisily on the hearth. Scrap, the black kitten, woke and stretched himself, and then began licking his sooty coat. Eden's needles clicked; then she stole a furtive glance at her silent companion—the strong, clearly cut features were as still and impassive as though they were carved in stone. By-and-bye she looked at the clock; it was past nine. In another half-hour Susan would come in with the bread-and-milk—for she and her husband retired early—and would wonder at seeing the Squire there. At this thought Eden moved restlessly, and Mr. Redford roused himself from his abstraction.

"I beg your pardon; am I keeping you?"—and now the Squire looked at the clock; "but I was trying to think things out. I have made up my mind to consult Lady Margaret; she knows all the circumstances, and she will be my best adviser. Very likely she will wish to see you, and will send you a message. In that case you will go to her, will you not?"

"Certainly. I am very fond of Lady Margaret, and it is always a pleasure to go to her." Eden was trying to hide her disappointment. She had hoped that Mr. Redford would have discussed things with her. His speech had led her to suppose this; but no, he was looking at the clock again. Very likely the lateness of the hour deterred him, for he rose slowly from his chair.

"Lady Margaret is the dearest friend I have in the world," he said gravely, "and I have always taken my troubles to her. I think myself that the best plan will be for me to take Bonnie away. If Lady Margaret agrees with me, I shall ask you to be good enough to accompany us; we may leave very suddenly. I trust that will not inconvenience you."

"Oh, no! I can be ready at any moment; but Mr. Redford, forgive me if I ask one question. It is not your intention, then, that Bonnie should see her mother?" But she was sorry she had put the question when she saw his face.

"She will never see her if it is in my power to keep them apart. Mrs. Ferard has told you a great deal, but it is quite impossible for you to understand everything. I cannot help it if you think me severe, Miss Lloyd; but I know my sister-in-law too well. She is not a true person; she prefers a crooked policy and underhand ways to straight dealing. I do not wish to be unnecessarily harsh with any woman, but her mother's influence would be most baneful to my poor child. She is cold-natured, calculating, and the life she has led has hardened her."

"You do not think, then, that her wish to see Bonnie after all these years may be a sign that her nature has softened?"

"No; certainly not," was the abrupt answer; "it is far more probable that she is in need of fresh excitement, and that she is doing this to annoy me. Mrs. Cecil Redford may have her virtues. I do not wish to speak ill of her; but

she is absolutely without heart, and when her mind is set on a thing, she is not always too scrupulous in her mode of attaining it. A strong will can work bitter mischief." Then he stopped suddenly, as though he had said too much. "Miss Lloyd, have you any idea whether she will call on you again within the next day or two."

But Eden shook her head. "I cannot possibly say, but I shall not feel safe from her visits; she seems very determined; she certainly said that I should soon see her again."

"Then we must provide against such a contingency," replied Mr. Redford quickly. "I think the best plan would be for you to spend the day at Heatherwood to-morrow. You must remain to luncheon as well as to dinner; there must be no going backwards and forwards to the cottage. I will see you across the wood myself in the evening."

"I will do as you wish, of course," returned Eden; but her voice was slightly dubious. She was not sufficiently at her ease with Mr. Redford to mention a little feminine difficulty that had occurred to her; but the Squire had plenty of

penetration, and he noticed her embarrassment at once.

"Well, what is it?" he began, in his abrupt fashion; then a light dawned on him, and, for the first time, there was something like a smile on his lips. "Oh, I see! it would not be according to propriety to sit down to dinner in a stuff dress. Well, well, George can bring up everything you want; but I do not wish you to go back to the Log Hut until evening. I will tell Bonnie to expect you. And now I must bid you good-night!" He shook her hand with unusual cordiality, and looked at her pleasantly.

"Many thanks for your thoughtful consideration; I am very grateful to you!" and then he took up his rough cape and went out.

Eden felt a little thrill of pleasure. Mr. Redford's manner had fully endorsed his words. He meant what he said; he was really grateful to her. He knew that he could count on her loyalty to him and Bonnie. This was something gained; after this evening he would surely not look on her as an outsider any longer.

Eden could not have told herself why she desired the Squire's friendship; but she was clear-

sighted, and she had long discerned that his nature was a noble one. Although adverse circumstances had warped it, these rough excrescences and humours were only like the rugged bark of some sturdy tree—within, the timber was smooth and finely seasoned; but only those who lived near him knew half the Squire's virtues.

Eden dimly perceived this, and she was interested in this strange, complex nature. She went back into the room with her pulse beating a little quickly. The atmosphere seemed full of suppressed excitement; there were indications of change—signs of gathering clouds over Heatherwood—breakers ahead that needed skilful navigation.

When she woke the next morning she had the same feeling—a sort of presentiment—that these quiet, tranquil days were over. In vain she told herself that such an idea was absurd and morbid. She could not shake it off; so she merely resolved to put the thought aside, at least for the present, and think only of her day's duties.

When she had given George his instructions she went across to Heatherwood. The day was

unusually bright. November seemed like October, the air was so soft and bracing, and the sunshine so golden.

Bonnie received her with wondering eyes.

"Uncle Alick says that you are going to spend the whole day with us," she said, as she lifted her fresh young face to be kissed. "I am so glad. We must think of something nice that we can do this afternoon. I can't think what has come to Uncle Alick, he seems so sociable. He actually told me that George was going to bring your evening dress. What a funny idea! I thought you would have preferred dressing at the cottage."

"It was very kind of Mr. Redford to suggest it," returned Eden quietly, "for it will save me a great deal of inconvenience; the woodland path is so wet and slimy with the dead eaves that it is rather an uncomfortable walk."

"Oh, I never thought of that!" was Bonnie's answer, and then they set to work; but she was in a talkative mood, and presently she began again.

"Uncle Alick has gone to the Dene again. Isn't it absurd? And we had tea there yesterday

—it was his birthday, you know. Oh, I forgot —I never told you, but he always has tea with Lady Margaret on his birthday, and she always gives him a present."

"Does she? What a nice idea!"

"She gave him a lovely present this time—a proof engraving of—— Oh, I forget the name!—it was something he had meant to buy himself when he could afford it. Do you know, Eden, it is so funny, but on his birthday, and on hers, he always kisses Lady Margaret — it is quite a custom of theirs; and on Christmas Day she kisses him: it does not matter who is there, she does it all the same. 'He is like my own son,' she once said to me. Oh, she is the loveliest old dear, and I do not wonder that Uncle Alick is so devoted to her." Then Eden, who had listened to this burst of confidence with great interest, induced her to resume her work. When the gong sounded for luncheon they found the Squire in his usual place; he greeted Eden rather gravely, and then began to carve. But Bonnie's voluble tongue needed no encouragement.

"So you have come back, Uncle Alick? You

look tired. And how is Grannie Margaret?"—a *sobriquet* that Bonnie often used.

"She is very well, and sent her love;" and here Mr. Redford paused to clear his throat before he delivered his message.

But Bonnie basely took advantage of him. "Uncle Alick, it is such a lovely day that I think Eden and I had better take a good long walk. We will go round by Hencotes to Bucklands, and across Bennerley Park to Earlsfield; we might have tea with Gatty on our way back. You would like that, would you not, Eden?"

But Eden was spared the trouble of answering.

"I was going to propose a very different plan," remarked the Squire pleasantly. "The new mare Briseis needs exercise, so what do you say to my driving you and Miss Lloyd in the dogcart to Farley? You told me the other day that you thought of taking her there one afternoon, as she had never been there."

Then Bonnie clapped her hands joyously. "What a splendid idea! I will be groom, Uncle Alick, and sit behind, and we won't take Carter; and we will have tea in the dear little inn."

"Very well, if you will promise to be quick over your tea—for I have to drive back by the Dene." Here Bonnie uttered an exclamation of incredulity, but Mr. Redford went on hurriedly,—

"Lady Margaret has sent you a message, Miss Lloyd"—but he did not look at her as he spoke. "There is a question she wants to ask you, so I promised we would see her on our way back from Farley; old people do not like to be kept waiting."

But this was too much for Bonnie's patience. "I never heard such nonsense," she said, rather crossly. "Eden can go to her to-morrow: there is no need to spoil our drive for Grannie Margaret's whim. Write a note, Eden, and say you will go to-morrow; we had quite enough of the Dene yesterday." But my Lady Frivol was rather surprised when her uncle's face grew severe.

"Miss Lloyd is going to the Dene this afternoon. I have already arranged it, Bonnie. Now will you go and get ready for the drive? The dog-cart will be round in a quarter of an hour."

Bonnie showed a good deal of temper when they went upstairs. The spoilt child did not love contradiction.

"I can't think what has come to Uncle Alick," she said, in a pettish voice; "he must have got out of bed the wrong way this morning. Did you see how he glared at me!"—and here Bonnie frowned at herself in the glass, and turned down the corners of her rosy mouth. "'Miss Lloyd is going to the Dene this afternoon. I have already arranged it.'" And the naughty child mimicked the Squire so cleverly that Eden could not help laughing, and this restored Bonnie to good-humour, and she was quite herself as she scrambled up into the back seat. Briseis was a sure-footed animal, and she got over the ground splendidly; and though Mr. Redford seldom opened his lips, Eden thoroughly enjoyed her drive.

She was almost sorry when they came in sight of Farley church, with its grey old tower mantled with ivy, where jackdaws built their nests.

While the Squire put up the dog-cart and mare, Bonnie showed Eden the church; then they wandered round the churchyard, and read the

SHE PAUSED TO READ ANOTHER RUDE INSCRIPTION.

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curious old epitaphs, overgrown with hoary moss. Some of them made Eden smile; presently she paused to read another rude inscription:

"SACRED TO WILLIE,
ONLY CHILD OF MARY LUCAS.

"Nor short, nor tall, with virtues blest
The widow's son has sunk to rest."

"Oh, I have a better one here," exclaimed Bonnie. "Look at the little grave with the wooden cross."

And Eden read aloud:

"Dear Baby cried, her pain was sore.
The angel came; she frets no more.

Well, there is something rather touching in that. I am sure the mother wrote it."

And then Mr. Redford joined them, and they walked through the quaint little town, with its black-timbered cottages and wide market-place, and then went to the inn; and the buxom landlady came up and talked to them while they had their tea. Afterwards Eden and Bonnie sat on the broad window-seat and watched the passers-by until it grew dark, and they heard the dog-cart rattling over the cobbles.

Bonnie pouted at the sound—to her the best of the afternoon was over; and even Eden became thoughtful as they drove rapidly down the dark country road.

The weather was unusually mild, and they had plenty of wraps, so there was no fear of taking cold, though more than once Bonnie complained of the length of the drive; but when Eden proposed to change places with her she refused.

"You are not used to a dog-cart," she exclaimed; "and when Uncle Alick turned a sharp corner, we should leave you lying in the road."

"Please don't harrow up our feelings in that ruthless way," interposed her uncle, in a sarcastic voice. "And there is no need to talk of changing places, for in five minutes we shall be at the Dene."

Ethel Graham met them in the hall. She was evidently on the watch for them. As she pressed Eden's hands she said, in a low voice, "Will you go to the Cedar Room at once, please?—Lady Margaret is expecting you; and I will take Mr. Redford and Bonnie to the Blue Room." And Eden did as she was told.

CHAPTER XIX

THE YOUNG WOMAN IN GREY

"Through thick and thin, both over bank and bed,
In hopes her to attain by hook or crook."
SPENSER'S *Faërie Queene.*

"Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower safety."
King Henry IV.

LADY MARGARET was in her winter corner by the fire, with an Indian screen round her chair to protect her from draughts; her fair old face was not quite so placid as usual.

"Oh, you have come at last," she said, as Eden closed the door. "It has been a weary day, my dear; my heart has been sore for Alick and the child, and the hours have been long, long!"

"I am sorry to hear that, dear Lady Margaret; but you knew I could not come to you before."

"No, I knew that; but it is ill to have patience when one's best friend is in trouble. Sit down close to me, my dear. I want to hear everything from your lips—what Madelon said, and how she

looked; and your own impression of her. I think much of your opinion, my dear Miss Lloyd, for you have a kind heart and a clear head, and Alick is too full of bitterness and prejudice to judge things with fairness."

Then Eden quietly related her interview with Mrs. Redford. Lady Margaret was quite silent until she had finished; then she said, with a heavy sigh, "Poor Madelon, she has not changed; she was always her own worst enemy."

"I am glad to hear you speak so kindly," returned Eden. "I must tell you frankly that I did not like Mrs. Cecil Redford at all; she is hard and shallow, and I should think a little shifty. But all the same, I pitied her; from her appearance I should think she is seriously ill, and she evidently suffers much. Lady Margaret, I am convinced in my own mind that she is really in earnest about Bonnie. I told Mr. Redford so, but he did not seem to believe it."

"No, my dear, he is very incredulous on this subject; but we must not be hard on him—she has made him suffer so cruelly, not only on his own account, but on Cecil's. He told me this very morning that he could have forgiven her

falseness and deceit to himself if she had only been a good wife to Cecil, but that he should never be able to wipe out the memory of her cruel neglect of her dying husband and her little child."

"No, I can understand that," in a low voice.

"Nothing that you or I could say would alter his opinion," went on Lady Margaret. "He says this new move on Madelon's part is nothing but a bit of play-acting, or a desire for some fresh excitement. He does not deny that her health may be bad, as he had seen in the paper that Daphne Chasmar had already retired from the stage; but he absolutely refuses to believe that any natural feeling for her child has brought her to Huntsmoor. He says nothing on earth will induce him to expose Bonnie to the risk of an interview with her mother, so he has decided to take her to Brighton to-morrow afternoon, and she will not return to Heatherwood until Madelon has left the neighbourhood."

Eden had been quite prepared for this. "Do you agree with him that this is the best plan, Lady Margaret?"

"My dear Miss Lloyd, I am getting an old

woman, and my nerves are weaker. I do not find it so easy now to contend with Alick's masterful will. If he would have listened to my advice, he would have gone to Rookwood Cottage and spoken to Madelon; but he positively declines to do this, so I suppose there is nothing else to be done; but of course you will be with them."

"Mr. Redford certainly said something about my accompanying them," replied Eden, "and I shall gladly do so; but I am a little surprised that he takes it so much for granted that I know all the sad details."

"Oh, my dear, that is very simple. We were talking about you one day, and I told Alick that he need not be afraid of trusting Bonnie to you, as Gatty Ferard had told you all about Madelon. I don't think he was quite pleased to hear it at first, but afterwards he acknowledged that she had done him a good turn. Hush! I can hear his footsteps; he has come to fetch you. I will tell him we have finished our talk."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Redford abruptly, as he came towards them, "has Lady Margaret told you that we start for Brighton to-morrow? I have just told Bonnie"—addressing his old friend,

—"and she is quite wild with delight; she thinks it is just a pleasure treat, bless her little heart. Now Miss Lloyd, I suppose you can be ready by then? I have made up my mind that we will take the three-thirty train from Elsenham, and stop for the night at the Grosvenor. I have telegraphed for those old lodgings, Lady Margaret, near Norfolk Street: the rooms are comfortable, and I like the people, and the situation is first-rate. I shall find the telegram awaiting me when we reach home."

"And you do not go down to Brighton until the following morning, then, Alick?"

"No, I have some business in town, and there is no occasion to hurry. Now Miss Lloyd, we must be getting back. I will send Bonnie in to bid you good-bye, Lady Margaret, but be careful what you say to her." Then he lifted the wrinkled old hand tenderly to his lips.

"Oh, I'll be careful, have no fear, Alick, my dear. Good-bye, Miss Lloyd; you have a difficult duty before you, but I am not afraid for you; you'll be a good friend to them both. There, take her away, and send the child to me. I will not keep her long."

Bonnie chatted blithely all the way home; she was in high spirits at the prospect of the treat. "It is ever so much nicer for Eden to be with us," she remarked more than once that evening. "I never did believe that old saying, 'Two are company and three are none,' for I am sure we shall be a charming little trio, and have no end of fun." But though neither of her companions returned a damping answer, they found it difficult to summon up much enthusiasm; and Eden especially felt relieved when the evening was over and she was at liberty to put on her wraps; her tired looks did not escape scrutiny.

"We have worked you too hard," remarked the Squire, as they traversed the little wood. "It has been an interminable day, and I am not sorry it is over. We shall be at the White Gate by two-thirty to-morrow; the luggage will go down a little before that. Now will you ask Susan if any one has called in your absence? and I will wait in the porch for the answer."

The Squire busied himself with his lantern until Eden came out; then he closed it at once. "Well?" he said abruptly.

"Yes, she has been here," returned Eden

hurriedly, "but I am thankful to say she refused to give her name or to leave any message; but she seemed very much put out at my absence."

"It is just as expected," replied Mr. Redford. "I am glad we have lost no time." He moved away, and then came back and held out his hand.

"Good-night," he said, with rough kindness. "Put all this out of your mind, and sleep well." But Eden stood still in the porch, listening to the retreating footsteps until they had died away.

"He is very kind. I am sure that he trusts me, and knows that I would not fail him," she said to herself as she fastened the cottage door, and then went to her room.

Eden was very busy the next morning packing up her things and writing to her brother to inform him of her movements. She had nearly finished when a dark shadow fell across her window, and she caught sight of velvet and fur. In a moment she realised her own carelessness. If she had only drawn down her blind! Her bedroom window was in front, and any visitor approaching the Log Hut by the road would inevitably pass her window. If Mrs. Redford had glanced in

that direction she must have seen the open box before which she was kneeling.

Vexed at her own thoughtlessness, Eden was in no mood for her approaching interview, and her face was very grave as she entered the parlour.

"You are going away," were Madelon's first words. "You are all going, of course." Then she laughed rather bitterly, and unclasped the fastening at her throat, as though she were suddenly oppressed with heat. "Really, this is quite an original and clever idea on Alick's part; the years are sharpening his wits."

"I cannot ask you to sit down," interrupted Eden, "as I am very busy."

"So I saw," was the cool answer. "May I give you a friendly hint, Miss Lloyd: it would be wise to pull down your blind if you do not wish for prying eyes. Well, so you are all off —a nice little family party, eh!"

But Eden remained silent.

"I suppose it is no use to ask where you are going? Ah, I thought not!" as Eden shook her head. "Alick has issued his orders, and you are tongue-tied. Never mind, where there is a will there is a way: that is a favourite

motto of mine, and I assure you I always act up to it."

Evidently Madelon desired to provoke Eden, for as she said this she deliberately seated herself.

Eden concealed her secret dismay, and regarded her steadily.

"Mrs. Redford," she said quietly, "when you were here before, you were good enough to inform me that I am a paid dependent of the House of Redford. You were perfectly correct, and I only wish to remind you that, as a member of Mr. Redford's household, I am bound to respect his interests. It is not his wish that I should hold intercourse with you; therefore, if you remain, you will oblige me to withdraw"—and Eden was actually leaving the room when Mrs. Redford called her back.

"Wait a moment, Miss Lloyd, I have something to say first. Really, for your position"—with a decided sneer—"you carry things with a tolerably high hand. I am not going to tax your hospitality very severely; I only wish to rest a few minutes, as even the slight exertion of walking from the gate is too much for me. Pray go on with your packing. I am quite sure you

have no time to lose. Perhaps you will tell Mr. Redford that I really quite regret that I have put him to so much inconvenience, but that I wish him and Bonnie *bon voyage?*" She waved her hand lightly in token of dismissal; but as Eden left the room she sank back in her chair, and there was a shade of perplexity on her face, as though she were unexpectedly foiled, and found it difficult to decide on the next move. "Hortense will help me," she muttered. "I must get back and take counsel with her;" and ten minutes later Eden heard the cottage door close, and slow footsteps pass her window; but this time the blind was down.

The brief interview with Madelon had decidedly damped her spirits, and she looked so grave that Mr. Redford darted more than one keen glance at her during their drive to Elsenham; but Bonnie, who was in radiant spirits, was too much engrossed with her own pleasurable anticipations to notice Eden's abstraction.

A little later, while Bonnie was amusing herself at the bookstall at Elsenham Station, Mr. Redford beckoned Eden aside.

'Well?" he said interrogatively. "I can see

by your face that something has happened. I suppose she has called again at the Log Hut?"

Eden nodded.

"Tell me all about it," he said quickly. "Bonnie is too busy turning over magazines to notice us, and we are quite out of hearing." Then Eden narrated the brief interview with Madelon.

As they walked up and down the little platform, they came face to face more than once with a dark-eyed young woman in grey, who took stock of them somewhat intently.

There were few passengers and little luggage, and the trim figure in grey attracted Eden's notice.

"She must be a Frenchwoman," she said to herself; "she looks like a Parisian milliner. She is not a lady, but she is perfectly dressed;" for with feminine insight Eden had noticed the neatly gloved hands. Once she paused by the luggage-truck as though to read the labels; then she strolled to the bookstall and bought a paper. In reaching across for it she stumbled against Bonnie.

"A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle!" she exclaimed, and her bead-like black eyes scanned

the girl's face curiously. "A penny, did you say, Monsieur?" to the keeper of the stall. "I have but the sixpence; if you will change it for me." And then the London train came up, and all the passengers took their seats.

Eden would have thought no more of the little Frenchwoman, only the following afternoon, as she and Bonnie were standing on the platform at Victoria, waiting for Mr. Redford to join them, she caught sight of her again. She was pacing up and down, and peering furtively into every carriage. By-and-bye she took up her station by the Pullman car. Once a porter asked her if she were looking for any one.

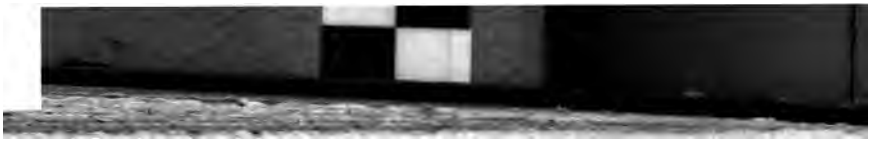
"*Mais oui*," Eden heard her answer; "the train is about to start, and my friends have not arrived. I will go out into the road to watch for them." But when the man left her, she did not move until the train was actually in motion.

Mr. Redford had secured a handsome suite of rooms in a house quite close to Norfolk Street. There was a spacious drawing-room, with three windows opening on to a balcony, overlooking King's Road and the parade; a lower one was to

be used for their meals, and to be reserved for Mr. Redford's use.

"Isn't it delicious?" exclaimed Bonnie, as they entered the room, which looked cheerful enough, with its bright fire, and shaded lamps, and tea-table. "I do so love coming to a fresh place in the evening; it is so cosy and so mysterious" —and Bonnie tried every chair in succession. Then she strummed upon the piano. Finally she crashed into the poodles' breakdown, and Pomp and Vanity solemnly marched into the centre of the room and commenced their performances, just as the servant brought in the teapot.

"And it is a mercy, Mary Anne, that I did not drop the tray," she observed, on her return to the lower regions, "for it was clean ridiculous, that it was, to see those ugly black beasts turning over head and heels like Christians in a pantomime. I had to bite my tongue hard to keep from laughing outright. It crossed my mind, Mary Anne, that it did, whether our new lodgers could belong to a circus, though I am free to confess they look like gentlefolks."



CHAPTER XX

TWENTY-THREE, CORNWALLIS GARDENS

"This was the unkindest cut of all."
Julius Cæsar.

THE next three weeks passed pleasantly, and there were no signs at all of the enemy. Mr. Redford learnt from the vicar that a few days after their departure from Huntsmoor, Rookwood Cottage was empty. "We have done the right thing," he observed to Eden, when he found himself alone with her for a few minutes. "I do not fancy Mrs. Redford will trouble us again—she has had a lesson;" and the Squire smiled exultantly.

Eden, however, looked at him a little gravely. "Do you mean that we are to go home?" she asked, and her tone was rather regretful.

But he shook his head. "No; we had better stay our month out—the weather is fine, and Bonnie is enjoying herself."

"I am enjoying myself, too," she returned

quietly ; and indeed, they were a very harmonious and happy little party.

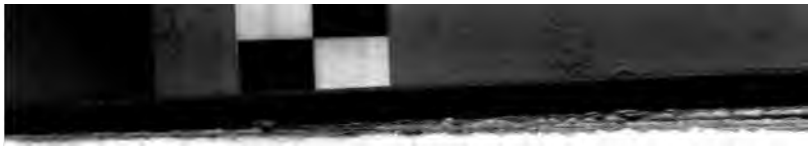
Eden felt that she was in no hurry to return to her hermit life at the Log Hut ; her present environment suited her much better. Mr. Redford spent most of his time with them. In the mornings she and Bonnie worked for a couple of hours, while the Squire wrote his letters and read his *Times*; and then they went out for a constitutional before luncheon.

Briseis and the dog-cart had been sent down, and on fine afternoons Mr. Redford drove them into the country. After dinner Eden generally read aloud to them. She had done so one evening ; the next night Mr. Redford had handed her the book silently, and after that it became her usual custom. It was evident that Mr. Redford appreciated the reading. He would lie back in his easy-chair, with his arms crossed under his head, and his eyes fixed on the leaping blaze, while Bonnie crouched beside him on the rug, with her ruddy head against his knee. Sometimes, too, when Eden laid down the book, they would discuss the subject with great animation.

Mr. Redford was no longer reserved and unapproachable; on the contrary, he treated her with frank cordiality, and took some pains to find out her opinions and to consult her tastes. She was no longer an outsider, to be kept in her place, and held at arm's length, but a trusted and confidential member of the household. Every day she learnt to appreciate more highly the Squire's simple and manly character, and the innate goodness of his heart.

When they had been at Brighton about three weeks, Mr. Redford had a letter from one of his tenants that obliged him to go down to Huntsmoor, so he decided that he would stay the night, and spend a few hours with Lady Margaret. Ethel Graham had told Eden in one of her letters—for they corresponded regularly now—that Lady Margaret missed his visits sadly, and that she did not seem in her usual spirits.

"If I take the early train to-morrow," observed the Squire, as they sat round the fire that evening, "I can see Lawson, and settle his business; and then I can go to the Dene. There are one or two things needing my attention, so I shall not leave

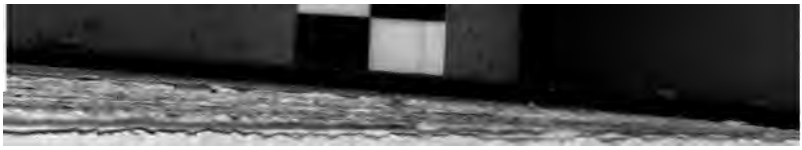


before the afternoon. The five o'clock express will bring me down in capital time for dinner."

As Bonnie intended to go to the station with her uncle, they had breakfast the next morning half an hour earlier. When they had started, Eden put on her walking things, intending to meet Bonnie.

As she stood on the steps a moment she saw, to her surprise, the same young Frenchwoman she had noticed at Elsenham and Victoria ; she wore the same grey dress and jacket, and the same close little black bonnet. She did not notice Eden, as a pillar of the portico hid her, but remained standing on the pavement, and looking up at the drawing-room window as though she were expecting to see some one. Eden thought this so singular that she could not help watching her. Presently the young woman turned away, and paced slowly up and down ; but each time her keen black eyes were fixed on the balcony.

"I wonder if I had better speak to her," thought Eden ; but before she could do so the young Frenchwoman caught sight of her, and



immediately crossed the road. A few moments later she saw her walking rapidly in the direction of Hove.

Eden felt a little uneasy; she wished that Mr. Redford were coming back that night. If it had not been for Lady Margaret he could easily have finished all his business. Eden could not shake off a sudden feeling of loneliness and responsibility; then she saw Bonnie coming towards her, and the morbid impression faded away.

Bonnie was full of plans for the morning's entertainment. Her early rising had demoralised her, she said, and she did not intend to work. They would go to Redfern's and choose her winter jacket; and as it was less than a month to Christmas, she might as well buy the servants' presents. Eden knew it was no good arguing the point, so she yielded with a tolerable grace, and they spent a busy morning making their purchases.

Bonnie was rather tired when they returned home, and insisted on having luncheon in her walking-dress. She was very much excited with all the pretty things she had bought.

"There will be no reading to-night, as Uncle Alick is away," she remarked, "so I shall sort my Christmas cards."

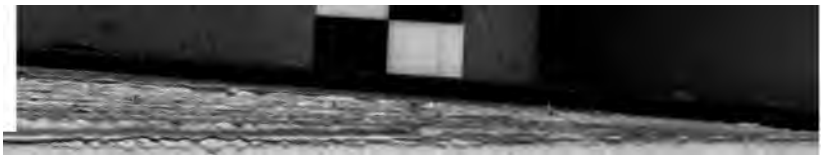
Presently the servant brought in a note for Eden. She glanced at it as Bonnie chattered on volubly.

The handwriting was strange to her, so she looked at the signature. The next moment she started up and walked to the window.

"Finish your luncheon, dear," she said hurriedly, "or Evans will come to clear it away."

But Bonnie only grumbled and protested at this. "Who is your correspondent?" she asked lazily, as she helped herself to the fruit tart. But if Eden heard the question, she did not answer it; she only replaced the note in the envelope and left the room. It was from Madelon Redford, and the address was 23, Cornwallis Gardens, Kemp Town. She had found them out, and had followed them. Then the remembrance of the young Frenchwoman in grey who had watched the house that morning flashed across Eden's mind.

Could that have been Madelon's little bird?



A confidential maid who knew how to play the part of spy for her mistress? Eden grew hot, and then cold, as she re-read the letter, the contents of which were as follows:

"My dear Miss Lloyd,—'My little bird' has cleverly discovered your whereabouts; but I have been ill, and too weak to travel, and I only arrived the day before yesterday. Now I am writing to entreat you to come to me—there is something of importance with regard to my child that I must tell some one. It is useless to send for Alick—nothing will induce him to come to me. As Shakespeare says, 'it is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant'; for I am only a woman after all, and a very weak one into the bargain. Dear Miss Lloyd, do not drive me to take any desperate step; if you do not wish me to enter your house in Alick's absence"—["Good heavens! how does she know he is absent?" thought Eden, as she read this]—"if you do not wish me to force Bonnie to see me, in your presence, come to me at once. You will see my address;

BONNIE TURNED ROUND IN DROWSY SURPRISE.

[*Page* 263.

if you refuse, believe me, you will repent it every day of your life.

"I remain,

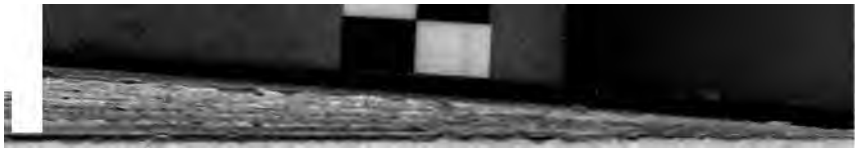
"Your much maligned and resentful

"MADELON REDFORD."

"What can I do? What ought I to do?" thought Eden anxiously. "How is one to deal with such a woman? I could leave her letter unanswered, and tell Evans that we can see no one in Mr. Redford's absence; but she is capable of forcing her way in, or waylaying us if we leave the house. Even if she does not enter, she may send in her card to Bonnie." And as all these difficulties occurred to her, Eden almost wrung her hands with doubt and perplexity. Finally she decided that the lesser evil would be to go.

"Can you spare me for a little?" she asked, peeping in at the open door of the drawing-room; "there is some business I want to do." Then Bonnie, who was curled up half asleep in the easy-chair before the fire, turned round in drowsy surprise.

"Why, you are never going out again, Eden!"



she remonstrated. "How can you! I am quite achy with fatigue. I can't think why shopping is so tiring, when there is nothing more delightful; but my legs are nearly dropping off."

"Have a nap, dear, and you will wake up quite rested;" and Eden, who was tired too, set off for her long walk to Kemp Town.

It was a dreary, chill afternoon, and the grey expanse of sea looked cold and uninviting; but her mind was too full of worry to heed outward dulness.

As she walked on, a young woman in grey rose from a bench on the parade and rapidly crossed the road. Then she turned up Norfolk Street, and let herself into a house with her latch-key.

Eden, who was fagged with her morning's shopping, felt as though she would never reach her destination, and when she arrived at last she was surprised to find that 23, Cornwallis Gardens, was a handsome-looking private house. A footman opened the door.

"Can I see Mrs. Redford?" she asked.

"No one of the name of Redford lives here," returned the man.

Eden started.

"This is 23, Cornwallis Gardens?" and Eden began to feel perplexed.

"Lady Compton lives here, ma'am, and we have had no one of that name calling here."

"What can it mean?" thought Eden, as she slowly walked down the steps. After a little further parley the man had informed her that they were all private houses in Cornwallis Gardens, and that no one let lodgings. There was no Cornwallis Road, or Terrace, or Square. So Eden felt she must give it up. She was sadly tired by this time, and it was beginning to rain, so she determined to take a fly from the next stand. As she turned into the main road, a sudden thought made her hot all over. "Suppose it were a ruse or trick on Madelon's part? Impossible!" she exclaimed aloud; but even as she said it, she knew there would be no peace for her until she reached her lodging; and the drive seemed almost endless to her.

When she had paid the fly man, she let herself

in, and hurried upstairs; but before she could turn the handle, Madelon's hollow little laugh reached her ear. Eden's heart beat fast, and her face was quite pale as she entered the room.

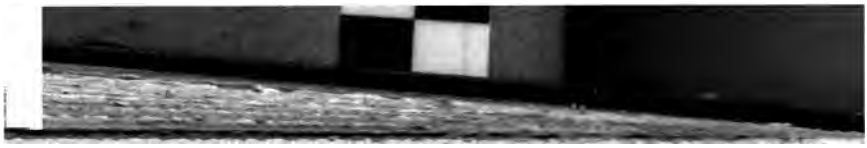
Of course it was a ruse; Madelon's mocking smile told her that at once. She had made herself quite at home, and had laid aside her mantle. She was sitting in front of the fire, and Bonnie was kneeling beside her on the rug. Bonnie's cheeks were flushed as though she had been crying, but her eyes were full of excitement. Eden crossed the room, and looked at the intruder sternly.

"Mrs. Redford," she said indignantly, "I would not have believed this, even of you. How could you stoop to such deceit!"

Madelon threw back her head and laughed, though her mirth was forced.

"My dear creature," she returned airily, "all is fair in love and war, and I was always clever at invention. What did I tell you?—'where there's a will there's a way.' I determined to see my child, and I wished to see her alone, and I have achieved my purpose. We have

had our talk, have we not, my Bonnie? and we understand each other a little;" and Madelon lightly tapped the girl's cheek. "*Ma petite*, you are your father's image; but you have not taken after me. Those are Cecil's eyes. Ah, poor Cecil, how adorable he used to look in his regimentals! 'Adonis Redford'—that was what they called him."



CHAPTER XXI

THE VOICE OF THE SIREN

"A thing devised by the enemy."
King Richard III.
"A hit, a very palpable hit."
Hamlet.

It was perfectly plain to Eden that Madelon was not at her ease—perhaps physical weakness was quenching her audacious spirit; but when she had finished her little speech, she sank back in her chair as though strength failed her. To Eden's eyes, experienced as she was in illness, Mrs. Redford looked thinner and more shrunken, and the hollows in her temples were still more noticeable.

Eden's tone was gentle when she spoke again.

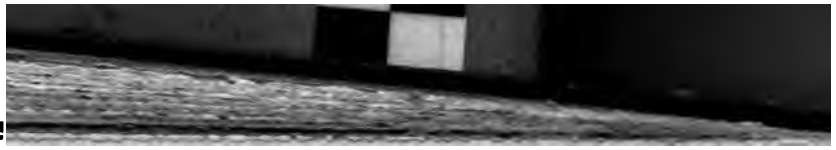
"Mrs. Redford, I must appeal to your sense of fairness; in Mr. Redford's absence I am responsible for Bonnie. Forgive me if I ask you to leave us."

Madelon's lips twitched and grew white; but she did not answer for a moment, she seemed in great pain. Bonnie looked at her in alarm.

"You are ill, mother," she said anxiously. Then she cast a resentful glance at Eden. "Why do you want to turn my mother out of the house?" she asked angrily. "If Uncle Alick were here, he would not be so inhospitable. We are strangers, I know; but all the same, she is my mother, and you shall not ask her to go away!"

"*Mon Dieu!* what a little spitfire!" exclaimed Madelon. "*Petite*—after all there is some Lefevre blood in you. But we must be reasonable, you and I, and perhaps our excellent Miss Lloyd is in the right. Listen to me, *chérie*. I must go now, for it is growing late. To-morrow, if it be fine, I will call for you, and we will have a drive together. We are good friends, are we not, my little Bonnie? and the past and its mistakes are nothing to us."

"No, of course not," broke in Bonnie, in her impetuous young voice. "To-morrow evening Uncle Alick will be back, and I will tell him all you have said. Do not fear, mother! I will



make him understand; he is so dear and good, and he always does the right thing. Oh! must you go?" and Bonnie put her arms affectionately round her mother's neck. Truly Madelon had used her time well, and Bonnie's honest young heart had already been won by her subtle fascination.

Madelon returned her kiss warmly.

"*Adieu—au revoir*, my angel!" she said caressingly. "Remember your poor mother leaves her best interests in your hands. 'The wisdom of the serpent'—take heed of that, my Bonnie; you must unite it with 'the innocence of the dove.' To-morrow we meet again;" and then she glided swiftly out of the door. Perhaps she had forgotten Eden, for she vouchsafed her no parting word.

"Bonnie," exclaimed Eden, in an agitated tone, as the door closed on Madelon, "you must do nothing of the kind. I cannot allow you to hold any further intercourse with Mrs. Redford until your uncle returns. You must promise me, dear, that you will be guided by me in this."

"I will promise nothing of the kind," returned Bonnie stubbornly. "You talk as though I were

a child, Eden ; but I am sixteen, and my mother says that that is quite grown-up. Certainly I shall drive with her. I think it is a shame of Uncle Alick to have kept us apart all these years. I always thought that I should be ashamed of my mother—that she was horrid and vulgar and common ; so, of course, I never wished to see her. I could scarcely believe my eyes and ears when the door opened, and a handsome, charming-looking woman came into the room and took me in her arms and said she was my mother. I felt so proud of her ! "

" Bonnie, my child, do listen to me," exclaimed Eden, in an anxious voice. But the girl did not heed. Bonnie was too excited to listen to any wise monitor just then. The siren's voice was in her ears, and Madelon's balmy kisses were still on her lips, and her excitement and wrought-up feelings needed the relief of speech.

" She is splendid. I think her beautiful ; and she is an actress, too. Fancy Daphne Chasmar being my own, own mother ! She thought I should be shocked when she told me that, but I clapped my hands, I was so pleased. Of course that is why Uncle Alick is so stiff and prejudiced.

He is old-fashioned, and he did not want me to know—oh, she explained it all to me, for we had such a nice long time alone. But I mean to tell him that he has made a mistake—that he has no right to keep my mother from me. She has no husband and no other child, and she says it is so sad and lonely for her."

"Bonnie!" exclaimed Eden, "I cannot listen to you any more; it is useless to argue. But you are wrong, quite wrong, and your uncle will tell you so. It is a very little thing that I ask you, dear"—and Eden took her hands—"I only ask you to give me this promise—that you will not attempt to see Mrs. Redford again until your Uncle Alick returns."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied Bonnie crossly, as she wrenched her hands away. "I am no child, and I owe you no obedience, and I shall certainly drive with my mother."

"In that case I will say no more," returned Eden, in a tired voice; and before Bonnie could answer she had quietly left the room.

She was terribly jaded, and almost unnerved by fatigue and mental strain; but her day's work was not yet finished. She went to her room, and

quickly filled up a telegram form ; then she took it herself to the post-office, and returned before Bonnie had missed her. She had sent a very curt message to the Squire. "They have met : please come to us. Much troubled." But she knew that he would understand it.

The evening was not a comfortable one. Bonnie was over-tired, and took no pains to control her irritability. Nothing that Eden said seemed to please her, so she very wisely left her alone, and it was quite a relief when Bonnie pleaded sleepiness and retired early to bed.

Eden secretly hoped that she would wake in a better frame of mind. It was therefore a great disappointment when Bonnie came into the room late for breakfast, and in a very bad humour indeed. She made snapping remarks as she ate her bacon, and grumbled continuously over her marmalade and toast ; and when Eden expressed an opinion on the weather, she contradicted her flatly.

"I think it a very fine day indeed!" she observed, looking out on the leaden-coloured sea and sky, which was aggravating, to say the least of it.

Poor Bonnie had slept fitfully, and her unavailing attempts to piece out the puzzle, and to find her way through a maze of difficulties and conjectures, had exhausted her patience and given her a headache. She was a shrewd, clever girl, although a self-willed one, and she was sharp enough to see that there was a mystery somewhere. Why had Uncle Alick separated her from this charming, lovable mother. Why had he never mentioned her name? "Is my mother alive?" she had once asked him, in childish curiosity; and he had frowned and answered, "Yes, I believe so; but we are not friends, and I know nothing about her. You are my child now, remember that." And his manner had been so stern that Bonnie had not ventured to say more.

This question had been asked several years before, but as she grew older Bonnie had not interested herself in her mother's fate—somehow she had taken it for granted that her father had married beneath him, and that her mother was not a lady; and Bonnie, who had a proud spirit, felt very willing to ignore the existence of a humbly born, uneducated parent. Her surprise

was unbounded, then, when Madelon had entered the room in her velvet and fur. Her sweet voice, trained to perfection on the stage, her subtle grace and handsome face, fascinated and charmed Bonnie. Madelon's dramatic power had taught her use pretty words of maternal tenderness, and Bonnie was too young and too sincere to imagine that they were not quite genuine.

"It is true I gave you up, my child," Madelon had said, in a broken voice, "but it was for your sake, and because necessity compelled me to do so. Alick—your uncle, I mean—drove a hard bargain with me—oh! I will not blame him," as Bonnie winced at this; "his intentions were good, but he has a stern, exacting nature, and he will have all or none.

"I think he might have let me see you sometimes," was Bonnie's petulant answer to this.

"I think so too, dearest—I shall always think so. But Alick is so narrow and prejudiced, and he never forgave me for taking up the stage as a profession—as though I should have injured my own child!"

"Uncle Alick was certainly horrid about that."

"No, not horrid, *chérie*"—and Madelon suppressed a smile at the girl's vehemence—"only prejudiced; but we must bring him to reason. At first it did not matter. I was young and strong, and my work filled my life, and I said to myself, 'perhaps it is better so; the little one is safer at Heatherwood with Alick than with me; what could I do with her here?' But now"—and here Madelon's voice grew honey-sweet with tenderness—"now my health has broken, and I can no longer do my work, and I yearn for my child. You understand me, *petite*, do you not? I am sick, lonely, and sad at heart, and I have a daughter—why should I be different from other mothers? Ah, my Bonnie, do you grasp it?" And of course Bonnie had grasped it, and her impetuous nature was up in arms.

It was not until breakfast was quite finished that Eden ventured to allude to unpleasant topics; but first she tried persuasive measures. "Bonnie, dear," she said gently, "I want you to come with me to Alison's this morning; they have not matched my silks properly, and I cannot finish my work."

"It does not require two people to match a

few skeins of silk," returned Bonnie, rather contemptuously. "I am sorry I cannot go with you, but I have an engagement." Then she flushed a little, nervously, and played with her knife and fork. "Surely you do not forget, Eden, that I have promised to drive with my mother?"

Eden was silent for a moment. It was no use renewing the argument; she must take other means.

"I am sorry that you still persist in your unwise resolution, Bonnie," she said gravely, "but I strongly advise you to re-consider it. I shall not be at all surprised if Mr. Redford comes down by a morning train."

"Oh, that's nonsense," returned the girl brusquely. "You heard him say to both of us that he intended to take the five o'clock express, so he cannot possibly be here until half-past six, at the earliest. What!" as Eden looked at her rather strangely, "do you mean you have actually written to him about this?"

"No, I have not written," returned Eden quietly; "there was no time for that, so I telegraphed instead. I was obliged to do so, my

dear," as Bonnie started from her chair; she was evidently furious. "You would not give me your promise, and I am in a very responsible position."

"Then you have done a very sneaking thing," returned Bonnie, in an exasperated tone. "I wonder what Joslyn would say to such treachery! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Eden; but I won't speak to you again, I declare I won't;" and Bonnie marched out of the room in a towering rage, with her pretty little chin cocked in the air.

Eden felt justly indignant at the girl's behaviour, but she could make allowances for her. Bonnie's little world was in chaos, and it was no wonder that she was upset. It was best to leave her to herself for a little, until she had recovered her temper, so Eden ordered the meals and wrote a business note or two; then she went in search of her.

She had fully expected to find that Bonnie had locked herself up in her room and was indulging in a good cry, but to her surprise the door was ajar, and when she looked in, the room was empty. The next moment her eyes turned anxiously to the wardrobe. Bonnie's hat and jacket were missing, and Eden returned full of dismay to

the drawing-room. Then she rang the bell and questioned the servant.

"Oh, yes, ma'am," replied Evans, "Miss Redford is out. I saw her leave the house half an hour ago; she seemed in a great hurry, and had her gloves in her hand."

"Thank you, I only wanted to know," returned Eden absently. But when the girl had left the room she seated herself by the window, and there was a worried look on her face.

"There is nothing that I can do," she said to herself helplessly. "I must just wait until he comes. I cannot follow her, for I do not know the address; but Mrs. Redford must have told her, and she has gone there, of course"—for Eden was too magnanimous, even in her thoughts, to accuse Bonnie of sneaking.

"I shall have to leave them," she went on sorrowfully. "It will come to that, I know. I have no influence with her—I cannot control her in the least; and Mrs. Redford will turn her against me!" And then Eden's eyes filled with tears, for she loved her wilful pupil dearly, and her life at Huntsmoor had been a very happy one. The next moment she eagerly leant forward, as an

open carriage drove past the house. The horses were black, and the coachman was in Russian furs; Madelon was lying back against the cushions, nearly smothered in fur rugs. She was laughing and chatting with Bonnie; the girl was sitting beside her, and looked bright and animated, and neither of them cast a glance in the direction of Eden, though she was now standing full in the window; but all the same, Madelon had seen her.

"Mademoiselle Propriety looks as cheerful as a mute this morning," she said, with a light laugh. "Are you not glad to escape from leading-strings, *petite*? Even the society of this admirable Miss Lloyd must be a little wearisome sometimes." But though Bonnie assented to this, there was a little flush of shame on her cheek, for in her heart she was warmly attached to Eden.

CHAPTER XXII

BONNIE PROVES CONTUMACIOUS

"Letting, I dare not wait upon I would,
Like the poor cat i' the adage."
Macbeth.

"I do perceive here a divided duty."
Othello

A QUARTER of an hour later Mr. Redford entered the room. Eden looked up at him without speaking, as he stood before her; then, as he saw her pained expression, he quietly sat down beside her.

"You had better tell me all about it," he said quietly, "and then we can take counsel together;" and he made no further remark until she had finished her account.

"And it is all my fault" she exclaimed sadly, "for of course I ought not to have left my post; but I believed that I was acting for the best;" and there were tears in Eden's eyes as she said this.

"It was an error of judgment," he returned; but there was no reproach in his voice. "It would have been wiser if you had stayed with the child, but you must not blame yourself too severely. How were you to suspect such subtlety and deceit?"

"No, I could not guess that; but Mr. Redford, I have failed so utterly with Bonnie—I have simply no influence with her. She was angry with me because I had sent that telegram, and she left the house without my knowledge." Then a stern look came to Mr. Redford's face, and he paced the room some time without speaking. Presently he sat down again.

"There is nothing to be done," he said decidedly. "If you knew the address, I would go myself and bring her away; but now we must wait until she chooses to return."

"I am afraid so," returned Eden sadly; "besides which, they are driving now. Bonnie knows that you are expected, so she will not dare to stay long." But Eden was wrong in her surmise, for they had finished luncheon, and still Bonnie had not returned.

When the meal was over Mr. Redford went

out, and Eden could see him pacing up and down the parade. Her heart misgave her as she watched him; he had said little, and there had been no word of blame for her mistake; but she could see that he was bitterly hurt and angry, and she trembled for Bonnie.

When it grew dusk he came in and sat down by the fire. Eden rang for tea; then she stood near him for a moment.

"Mr. Redford," she said, rather timidly, "Bonnie is acting very wrongly, and she is treating you badly; but I am sure her mother is to blame for this long delay. Bonnie is impulsive, and she is easily led away. Please do not be too angry with her."

"It is very good of you to plead for her," he returned coldly, "but Bonnie has to answer to me for this; she has been both disloyal and disobedient. I could forgive the disobedience better than the disloyalty;" and Eden sighed, for she saw that Bonnie's thoughtless conduct had wounded him severely.

Half an hour later they heard Bonnie running up the stairs. She came into the room quickly; her face was flushed, and again Eden noticed that

she had been crying; but she tried to appear at her ease.

"So you have got back, Uncle Alick," she began, and she would have come up to him and kissed him as usual, but he put her from him. Then Bonnie bit her lip and frowned.

"I hope you are not going to be nasty with me, Uncle Alick," she said crossly. "Eden has been nearly worrying me out of my life this morning. I have done nothing wrong. I have a right to go to my own mother; and even you, Uncle Alick, shall not prevent my doing my duty. She is ill, and she wants me, and I am her only child."

Bonnie's eyes were quite fierce as she said this; she was angry at finding herself in the position of a culprit; never before had Uncle Alick refused to kiss her.

"Bonnie," returned her uncle sternly, "you, have to listen to me, please. You have lived with me for eleven years—in all those years you have been treated as my own child. Have you ever had an angry look or word from me?"

Bonnie's lip quivered, and she shook her head.

"Eleven or twelve years ago your mother gave

BONNIE WAS CRYING BITTERLY NOW.

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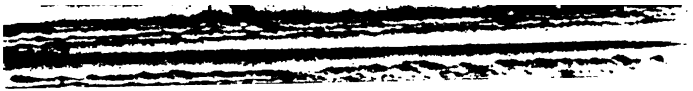


up all rights to you—my lawyer has the papers that she signed—by which she bound herself never to claim you in any way, or to attempt to see you. We had no difficulty in inducing her to promise this, for she was quite willing to part with you." Here Bonnie winced, and would have opened her lips to protest; but Mr. Redford silenced her, and went on,—

"From that day you belonged to me, and your mother became a stranger to you. I have no intention of extenuating my own conduct; if you cannot trust me after all these years, I certainly will not stoop to defend myself; you are old enough now to judge. But I tell you, once for all, I will have no traitor or disobedient child in my house; you will give me your word of honour not to see your mother again without my permission, or——"

But Bonnie would not let him finish his sentence. She was crying bitterly now.

"Oh, Uncle Alick," she sobbed, "you cannot be so cruel; you have been the dearest, kindest, best of fathers, and I would not hurt you for worlds. I did not mean to be disobedient or to go against your wishes, but I could not help

myself: it was all so sudden, and I was alone, and——"

"Were you alone this morning? I understand from Miss Lloyd that she entreated you not to see your mother again until I returned."

"Yes, yes, I know: but I had promised to drive with her, and I would not break my word; and then, coming back, she had a faint attack, and I was frightened, and I stayed with Hortense until the doctor came. It was close here, in Norfolk Street, the first house on the right; so I have been quite near all the afternoon. Oh, Uncle Alick, she is so ill, and when she clung to me, and begged me not to leave her, how could I refuse?"

"You were in a difficult and painful position—I do not deny that; and if you will promise to be guided by me in this, and to do nothing in future without my knowledge and permission, I will not be hard on you; indeed, I will bring myself to forgive you, though your conduct has hurt me cruelly, but I must have your solemn promise."

Then I began weeping. "Oh, dear Uncle [illegible] you dearly,

but I cannot be hard on my poor mother. What has she done that she should be punished so cruelly? Ah, I know that when I was a little child she did not care for me—she told me so herself, and that I was in her way; but she wants me now. Yes, indeed, Uncle Alick"—as Mr. Redford shook his head with an incredulous smile—"she is ill, very ill, and lonely; and she wanted to see me for my father's sake——"

Then Mr. Redford interrupted her with angry impatience. "Bonnie, you do not know your mother as well as I do; there is not a word of truth in all this. Good heavens! to think you have lived with me all these years, and that you cannot trust me better than this—that you think I could be hard on a woman without cause! Your poor father was cruelly neglected on his death-bed. As a child, your mother had no natural affection for you. I took you from her because I dreaded ill-treatment for you—because she had no room in her heart for her child. Bonnie, I will hear no more; you owe her no duty, and you must choose between us."

Then Bonnie threw herself upon his arm with a little cry. "Uncle Alick, you cannot be so

cruel. There is no one in the whole world whom I love as I love you; but I will not forsake my poor, unhappy mother."

Then Mr. Redford deliberately freed himself from the girl's despairing grasp; his face was set and stern. "I have nothing more to say," in a hard voice. "When you have come to your senses we will speak of this again;" and then he turned and left the room.

Bonnie flung herself upon the rug, and lay there quivering with sobs from head to foot.

Eden knelt down beside her, and vainly tried to soothe her. "Dear Bonnie, hush! the people of the house will hear you. Indeed, you must not cry so; you will make yourself ill."

"What does it matter if I do make myself ill?" sobbed Bonnie. "Oh, I would rather die than have Uncle Alick turn against me like this. Did you ever hear anything so cruel, Eden? But I forgot, of course you will take his part. Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do!" and the poor, undisciplined child hid her face in Eden's lap.

"Darling," whispered Eden, as she gently stroked the ruddy locks, "he is your best friend, and you must obey him. Believe me, Bonnie,

hard as it seems to both of us, your uncle is acting as he believes for the best."

"Then you think it hard for me, Eden?" in some surprise. Evidently Bonnie had not counted on this sympathy.

"My dear child, it is cruelly hard, but your duty is plain. Your uncle has a right to claim your obedience; you must submit to be guided by him. Perhaps he may change his mind when he sees how your heart yearns after your mother; he may see fit to withdraw these restrictions: but you must give him your promise first, Bonnie."

"Oh, I cannot, I will not, Eden! I dare not give it. I am a woman now. Oh, you need not laugh." Eden had never been farther from laughing in her life; but at sixteen one is not a child. "If my mother were to die, and I had refused to see her, I could not forgive myself." And though Eden argued with her, and strove to point out to her faithfully that her first duty was to submit, and afterwards to endeavour to change her uncle's opinion, Bonnie would not yield the point; and she grew so excited and hysterical that Eden coaxed her to go to bed, and sat by her side until she sank into an exhausted sleep.

It was a miserable evening. Mr. Redford made no inquiries after Bonnie. He had relapsed into his old taciturnity, and hardly spoke.

The next morning Bonnie woke with a headache, and she looked so white-lipped and heavy-eyed that Eden advised her to remain in bed, and let her bring her some breakfast.

"Bonnie has a headache, and really looks quite ill," she said, as she entered the dining-room.

But Mr. Redford made no answer.

Later in the morning, as Eden was writing a letter, he came up to her. "I have made up my mind that we may as well go back to Heatherwood to-morrow," he said curtly. "I suppose you can be ready?"

"Oh, yes—certainly."

"Then, when Bonnie's head is better, will you tell her, please? and also tell her"—here his voice was very decided—"that I am waiting for that promise. There can be no talk between us until then."

"Need I tell her that?" returned Eden gently. "Poor child! she really looks so miserable."

"Yes, you had better say it," was Mr. Redford's sole answer; and then he took up his paper and went out.

Just before luncheon Eden went up to Bonnie; but she was lying so still that Eden hoped she was sleeping, and stole softly out of the room so as not to disturb her.

About an hour and a half afterwards she was just thinking that she would go again, when Mr. Redford entered the room abruptly. He looked very white. "Read that," he said; and as Eden took the note from his hand she saw it was in Bonnie's childish scrawl.

"DEAR UNCLE ALICK," it said, "you must forgive me, but when you read this I shall have gone to my mother. Oh! do be good to me, for I am so miserable. I love you so dearly, and yet I am obliged to disobey and hurt you; but I promised to go to her again, and Hortense came to my window just now and told me that she was much worse, so I put on my things at once. Will you come to me here?

"Your unhappy and loving

"BONNIE."

Eden's eyes were full of tears as she handed Mr. Redford the letter. "Do not put too great a strain on her," she pleaded, in a low voice.

"Poor child! she is almost torn asunder between her love for you and what she considers her duty to her poor mother." But Eden's words seemed to fall on deaf ears, and he made no reply. A minute later she heard the hall door close.

The afternoon seemed endless to Eden; she dared not leave the house, and it seemed impossible to settle to any employment; but at tea-time Mr. Redford returned. To her surprise, he was alone. Eden's eyes questioned him anxiously as she handed him a cup of tea.

"Oh, I have not been there yet," he observed curtly; "I thought it better to see Dr. Davis first. I saw his carriage at the door, and spoke to the coachman, and then I waited at his house."

"Well?" in a breathless voice.

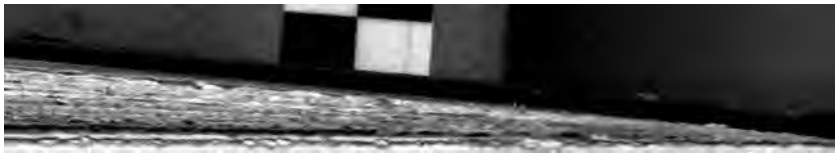
"Oh, there is no duplicity about that," he continued hurriedly. "I explained the relationship, and Dr. Davis was quite unreserved with me. Mrs. Cecil Redford is suffering from an incurable disease; during the last few months she has been rapidly getting worse."

"And there is no hope of improvement?"

"None; it is only a question of weeks. Of course, this complicates matters."

"Say rather simplifies it;" and there was a strong appeal in Eden's eyes. "Mr. Redford, forgive me if I say what I think: that Bonnie's place for the present is with her dying mother."

"I knew you would say that," he returned, a little roughly. "Well, if you have finished tea, we may as well go round." And Eden, marvelling greatly, dressed herself quickly and left the house with him.



CHAPTER XXIII

"WILL YOU BID ME GOOD-BYE, TOO?"

"Leave them thy past, 'tis in vain to regret
For things said and done: what availeth thy weeping?
The soul of the grave on the dead past is set,
Then leave it to rest in the angel's safe keeping."

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

THE door of No. 1, Norfolk Street was ajar; the maid had just run across the road to the pillar-box, and Mr. Redford quietly entered and walked up to the drawing-room. There was no sound of voices, so he knocked; and as no one bade him come in, he opened the door, and Eden followed him closely. The lamps had not been lighted, but the fire burned brightly. Madelon lay on a couch, half buried in Indian shawls and rugs; her face looked death-like, and her eyes were closed. Bonnie was on a stool beside her, holding her hand. When she saw them she uttered an exclamation that roused the sick woman.

BONNIE LAID HER CHEEK AGAINST HIS HAND.

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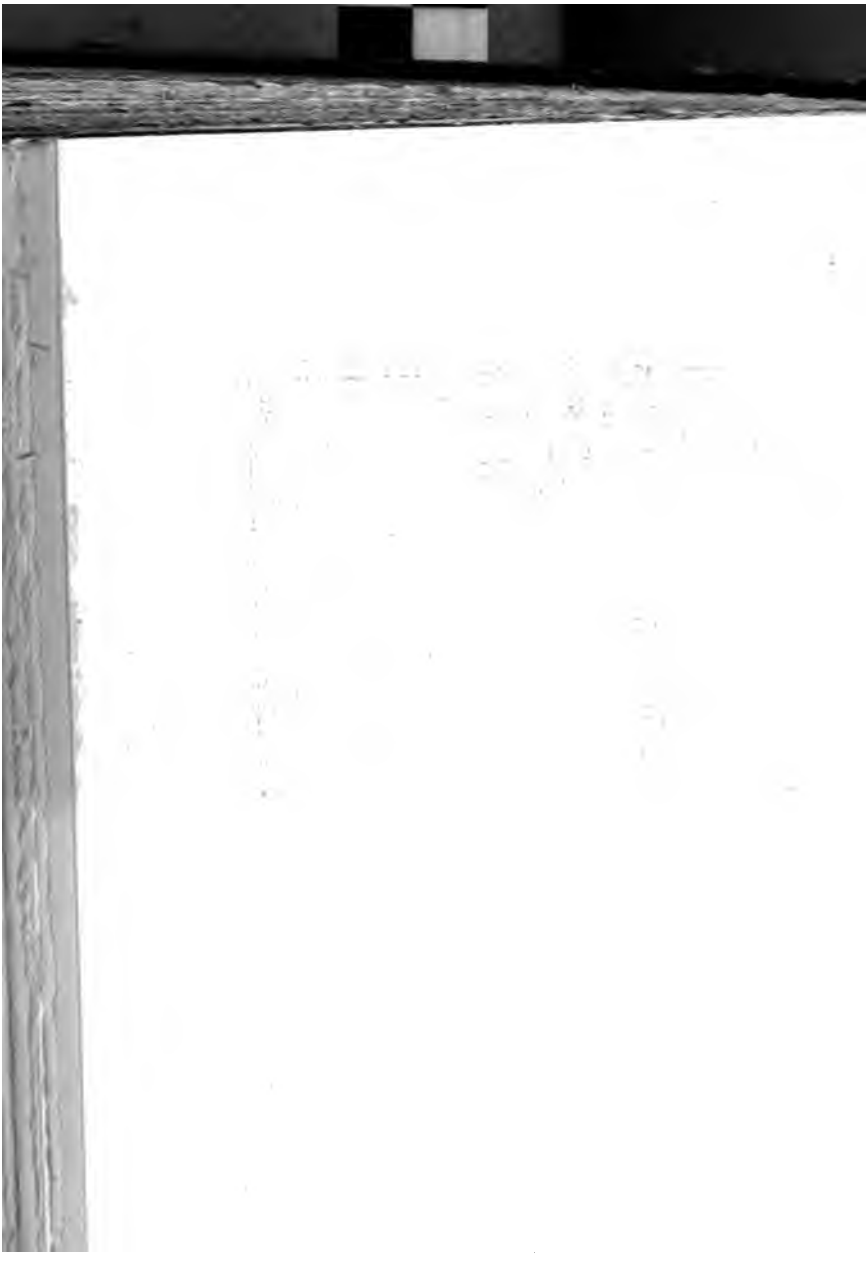


"*Petite*, how you have startled me!" she said peevishly. "Ah, it is you, Alick," and she looked at him with curious intentness. "Well, we have been expecting you. Why do you stand there like an avenging angel? If you have anything to say, sit down, for pity's sake."

Madelon spoke with nervous irritability, but Mr. Redford only moved to the rug, and stood there with his arm against the mantelpiece. Bonnie crept up to him unperceived, and laid her cheek against his hand; but he took no notice of her. Madelon watched them both closely.

"*Petite*," she said suddenly, and her voice was thin and sharp, "your uncle has come for you, and you must go back with him; he is right, and you belong to him now. Spare me a scene, Alick, for I am weaker than a child, and take her away. I have done mischief enough, and I will not come between you now. Why do you not answer me? *Mon Dieu!* am I not punished sufficiently?" and Madelon looked at him with miserable eyes. "Is it possible that your heart is so hard that even my wretchedness does not touch you?"

"For God's sake do not mistake me so utterly,

Madelon," returned Mr. Redford, in a tone of strong emotion. He knew now that she had not lied to him, and that a dying woman lay there before him. "Do you think that I have no pity —that I cannot feel for your sufferings when I remember——" Then his voice broke, and he turned away his head.

Madelon's brilliant eyes were suddenly suffused; her expression softened. "There is to be peace, then? Thank you, Alick; you are a good man, and I could almost find it in my heart to ask your forgiveness, only it seems too strange that Madelon Redford could ever ask human forgiveness;" and her lip curled with its old cynical pride.

Then he lifted his head and looked straight at her. "Do not fear to ask it," he said gently; "it would not be refused you. Yes, my poor Madelon, during the time that remains there shall be peace between us, if you will have it so; and I will try to forgive you, as I shall hope one day to be forgiven." Then she held out her thin hand to him without speaking, and he took it also without a word.

Bonnie watched them with awe-struck eyes.

"And the child, Alick—you will let me see her sometimes?" and there was no mistaking the yearning in Madelon's hollow voice.

Mr. Redford bowed his head in assent. "I must take her away now," he returned; "she has been here long enough; but she shall come to you every day if you wish it."

Then Bonnie covered his hand with kisses. "Oh, Uncle Alick, how I love you for this!" and the girl's lips quivered, and her eyes were streaming with tears.

"Hush, *petite*," observed Madelon faintly. "Alick, you are right—I cannot bear more; you must all leave me. Kiss me, *chérie*, and to-morrow we will see each other again. There must be an end of this little scene—it is too dramatic to suit an invalid;" and then Eden, who had remained discreetly in the background, whispered to Bonnie to ring the bell for Hortense, and to come away.

The long strain of the day had been too much for Bonnie, and at dinner she could eat nothing. Eden begged her to go to bed, but Bonnie would not hear of it. She spent the remainder of the evening curled up on the rug at her uncle's feet,

with her head on his knee; and though Mr. Redford was strangely silent, he evidently liked to have her there, for more than once his hand rested tenderly on her hair.

Just as the evening was over, he said suddenly, "I have been trying to think what can be done, under the circumstances, and I have decided that I will go back to Heatherwood to-morrow, and leave you and Bonnie here."

He addressed Eden, but it was Bonnie who answered,—

"Oh, dear Uncle Alick, you will be so lonely without us," she exclaimed, in a distressed voice; "and we shall both miss you so;" and although Eden did not endorse this statement in words, she certainly looked a little serious.

"It cannot be helped," returned Mr. Redford curtly; "it is Hobson's choice. I have been too long away from Heatherwood as it is, and things are going wrong. I can come down from Saturday to Monday every week, but that is all I can promise."

And so it was arranged. But before he left them the next day he spoke a word to Bonnie.

"My dear," he said, very kindly, "everything

is straight between us, and your little sins are wiped out of my memory; but I want you to promise me one thing."

"Oh, yes! I will promise anything, Uncle Alick," returned Bonnie, with reckless generosity.

"No, my child, only this one thing, that you will be guided by Miss Lloyd in your intercourse with your mother. Remember, she is in a position of great responsibility, and do not make things difficult for her. She is experienced in illness, and she knows my wishes, so I can safely trust you to her. Do not encroach on your privilege, Bonnie. A few hours daily may be spent with your mother; but when Miss Lloyd calls for you, you must promise to leave at once." And Bonnie, whose honest young heart was fairly brimming over with love and gratitude, promised without reserve.

It was a strange life that Eden and Bonnie led during the next few weeks. There were some attempts at lessons each morning, but they seldom lasted for more than an hour. Bonnie was a restless little person, and needed a good deal of exercise; so when the weather permitted, she and Eden had long bicycle-rides or walks. Directly

after luncheon Bonnie went round to Norfolk Street.

Madelon, who grew weaker day by day, never rose before noon, and she liked the girl to come to her as early as possible in the afternoon. Eden always called for her about six, but she rarely stayed many minutes. Madelon did not care for her society, although she tried to be pleasant; but the effort was perceptible, and as she had a nurse now, Hortense's responsibility was much lightened. Bonnie was unconsciously gaining great influence over her mother—the girl's sturdy good principles and simple faith produced their effects. Sometimes in the twilight Bonnie would say a word or two very shyly and awkwardly; but still, she said it; and now and then she would repeat a hymn softly, or sing it in her fresh young voice; and Madelon made no objection; indeed, the singing pleased her. "You have a sweet voice, *petite*," she said once. "Oh, you ought to have lessons from Madame Lucca. I must tell Alick. Oh, there will be money enough, and you will have it all, *chérie*. What! crying? What a foolish Bonnie!" But Madelon's eyes were not quite dry as she spoke.

Each Saturday Mr. Redford came down to dinner, and on Sunday afternoons he always went round with Bonnie to Norfolk Street. Madelon seemed to like his visits, and the three would talk together quite comfortably. To be sure, Madelon's moods were still uncertain, and now and then there would be a return of the old cynicism; but it was evident to Mr. Redford that Bonnie's presence was a great restraint, and her mocking speeches were always followed by some light word of endearment.

"She is Cecil's image," she once said to him. "She will never be beautiful, her features are too irregular; but she will have what is better than beauty—the gift of fascination. I had it, Alick, had I not?" and then Madelon sighed for her lost kingdom, when, as Daphne Chasmar, her golden voice and rare grace had charmed men's hearts to her.

Christmas was spent at Brighton, and it was not until early in the new year that the end came. As usual in this disease, the change for the worse came very suddenly.

One Sunday morning Hortense came round to tell them that her mistress was unconscious, and

that they had sent for Dr. Davis. Bonnie was taking the dogs for a run before church-time, so Mr. Redford started off to meet her, and Eden went round at once.

Dr. Davis had just arrived, and she waited for him to come downstairs. "Mrs. Redford may last some hours," he said to her, "and she may possibly regain consciousness; but there is nothing that I can do. Sister Barbara is an excellent nurse; but, of course, I shall look in again in an hour or two."

It was a trying day for all of them, and the hours stole heavily away. Towards evening, as they sat together round the blazing fire, Sister Barbara sent a message to summon them to the sick-room. Mrs. Redford was going fast, and she thought there were signs of returning consciousness. Then Mr. Redford looked at Bonnie, and they went up together, hand in hand, and Eden followed them. As they stood by the bedside, the dying woman opened her eyes. "Do not be frightened, *petite*," she said faintly; "kiss your poor mother, and bid her good-bye." Then Bonnie broke into piteous sobs; but Sister Barbara drew her gently away.

"Will you bid me good-bye, too, Alick?" murmured the hollow voice; and as he stooped and kissed her brow, a wondering, almost a happy look, came into the dim eyes.

"You have made me believe it, Alick," she whispered. And as he bent over to catch the inarticulate words, he heard her say, "Yes, I—even I—dare to believe in the forgiveness of sins."

These were her last words; ten minutes later Sister Barbara closed her eyes. Death had come to Madelon so peacefully and gently that no one knew the actual moment of departure. She had sighed out her last fluttering breath like a worn-out child sinking to sleep.

Her mother's death was a terrible shock to Bonnie. For the first time in her young life she had been brought face to face with the veiled mysteries of death and sorrow; and as it is the fate of those who touch the hem of the garments of these dark angels to regard life ever afterwards with wiser and sadder eyes, so it was with Bonnie. After that day she was no longer the giddy, irresponsible being that had earned for her the name of My Lady Frivol. Her grief was so excessive that Eden feared she would be ill. "I do so

miss her," Bonnie said one day. "I knew her for such a little while—only just those two months—but I grew to love her so dearly." And indeed, the girl's frank, open nature had responded like a musical instrument to Madelon's practised touch.

"I think we had better get back to Heatherwood as soon as possible," observed Mr. Redford on the evening after the funeral. But though Eden agreed that this would be the wisest plan, she had a curious revulsion of feeling. The thought of taking up her solitary life again in the Log Hut filled her with repugnance; but, with her usual unselfishness, she did not speak of it. "My life here has spoiled me," she thought; and then she resolutely turned her attention to other things.

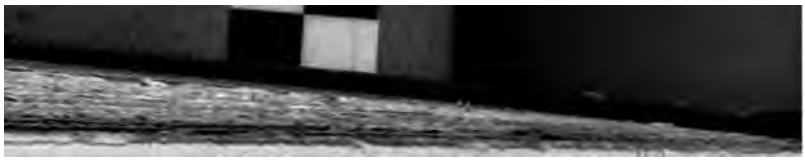
A week of fretting seems like a year to a girl of Bonnie's age, and it was evidently a relief to her to occupy herself with her packing; and that day she ate her luncheon with some approach to appetite; and the next morning, as they drove to the station, with Pomp and Vanity careering beside the carriage, she was almost cheerful.

"Oh, Uncle Alick, I am so glad we are going home!" she whispered, with a squeeze of his hand, as they stood together at the station.

Then Mr. Redford said a very strange thing: "I don't believe Miss Lloyd is as glad as we are, Bonnie;" and then they exchanged a look. Eden flushed with sudden embarrassment, and moved away; she had made such efforts at cheerfulness all the morning, but it was impossible to hoodwink the Squire.

Eden parted with her friends at the white gate. "Good-bye until to-morrow morning," she said, with a smile at Bonnie; and then she stood leaning on the gate, looking after the carriage until it had turned the corner. It was a lovely morning in January, and the trees and shrubs were sparkling with hoar-frost in the sunshine; the pigeons were sitting in rows on the roof, and Scrap, the black kitten, was watching them as she sat on a wheelbarrow, washing her face. At the sound of Eden's footsteps Susan came out, wiping her hands hurriedly on her apron; in her clean print dress and fresh white sun-bonnet she looked more winsome and buxom then ever.

"There, I am glad to see you, Miss Lloyd," she said, shaking hands with her heartily. "I declare the cottage has seemed quite lonesome without you, and even George and the dumb



things have missed you. There, now, didn't I say so?" as Scrap, with uplifted tail, came, with loud purrs, towards her mistress. "Well, now, to think that that grandly dressed lady should be Miss Bonnie's mamma;" for the news had travelled down to Huntsmoor that Mrs. Cecil Redford, who had stayed at Rookwood Cottage, was the Squire's sister-in-law and Bonnie's mother; that they had quarrelled when Bonnie was a child, and had been reconciled before Mrs. Redford's death.

It was natural that an old servant of the family like Susan Russell should be both curious and interested, and Eden had to answer a torrent of questions while she unpacked. She was thankful when at last Susan went off to get her husband's tea, and she was left in peace to finish. As she sat over her early supper that evening she wondered how she should occupy herself. She was in no mood for letter-writing, and she had finished her book. "I suppose I had better get my knitting," she thought, "and go to bed early;" and when Susan had cleared away she brushed up the hearth, and then Eden drew up her favourite chair to the fire.

CHAPTER XXIV

"THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH"

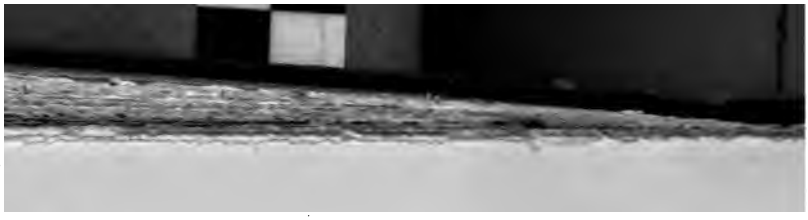
"'Twas the story first told in Eden,
And wherever young hearts are found,
That story will be repeated
As long as the world goes round."

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

FOR once the pretty parlour looked dull and solitary in Eden's eyes, and as she knitted busily she wondered what the Squire and Bonnie were doing, and if they missed her half as much as she missed them. The next moment the sound of footsteps near her window made her start and change colour.

The outer door was locked, but as she opened it the light from a lantern flashed in her eyes, and there stood the Squire, and Bonnie beside him, wrapped up in his old rug.

"Uncle Alick was sure you would be dull, so we have come to sit with you," explained Bonnie, who looked quite tall and womanly in her black



dress. "It did seem so stupid without you at dinner-time, and when I said so Uncle Alick agreed with me; and then he proposed that we should give you this surprise."

"It was very kind of you," returned Eden gratefully. "I am afraid my nice social evenings at Brighton rather spoilt me for my hermit life; but I shall get used to it by-and-by." Eden's smile was sweet, but it was a little sad, too.

"Well, we were just thinking the same, were we not, Bonnie?" and the Squire took possession of the big easy-chair with much satisfaction. "We have got used to you—that's the fact, Miss Lloyd—and we don't like being deprived of your society"—(here he looked at Bonnie, who nodded, and said "Go on");—"so we want you to spend all your evenings with us, and to go on exactly as we did at Brighton. Well, there is no objection to that, surely?" with a sharp look at her, for Eden was silent from excess of pleasure. She had been missed—they both wanted her. Mr. Redford's kind proposition touched and gratified her beyond measure.

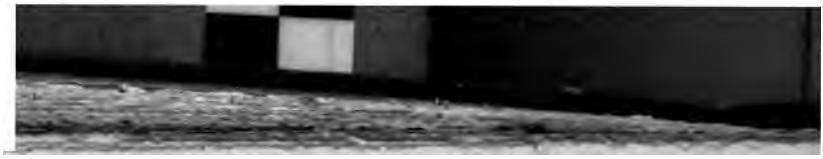
"There can be no objection on my part," she returned, in a low voice. "If you really want

me, I shall be very glad to spend my evenings at Heatherwood; but I must make one stipulation"—and here she looked at the Squire a little shyly—"there must be no escort of an evening. With my lantern I can go through the little wood quite safely alone."

"Oh, that is a matter of detail," was the careless reply. "There is no need to trouble your head about that; there are men enough about the place, so I think there will be no difficulty on that score."

Eden did not venture to say more, though she was sure from the Squire's manner that he intended to escort her himself; and the rest of the evening was spent pleasantly in talking of other things.

From that day there were no more lonely evenings for Eden. She resumed her reading aloud; sometimes they had music or played chess, or Mr. Redford instructed them on the political situation of Europe as she and Bonnie worked: and whatever they did, it was always a surprise when the clock struck ten. When Bonnie went out with her uncle Eden always spent her afternoons at the Log Hut. She wrote



her letters and mended her clothes, and put her affairs generally in order. An hour or two of solitude was merely a luxury; and as the spring afternoons lengthened and the weather grew warm, she loved to sit at her window and look out at the tender green of the budding foliage. When Easter came she obtained permission from the Squire to spend a week with her brother, but she thought he gave it rather grudgingly. Ivy had been ailing more than usual during the winter, and Rosamond was anxious about her, and it was a duty to go and cheer them up. But when the visit was over, Eden was almost surprised herself at the gladness with which she set her face in the direction of Elsenham, and Bonnie smiling a welcome to her from the dog-cart, at the station door was the most refreshing sight in the world.

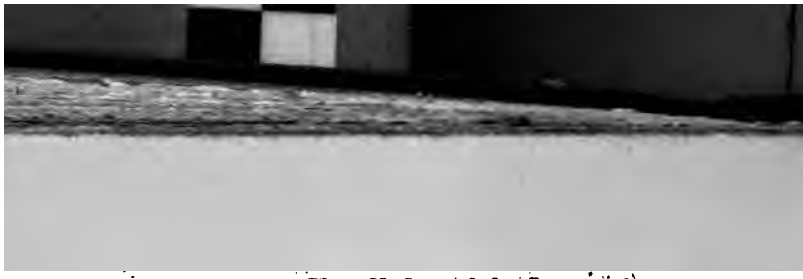
"I can scarcely believe you have only been away a week," exclaimed Bonnie, as they drove through Elsenham. "It seems more like a month. Uncle Alick was grumbling the other evening because I read so badly—he has been as grumpy as possible, Eden. He is always grumpy when he misses people, you see," continued Bonnie

frankly. "I play chess so badly, and I just hate those old politics." But Eden only smiled in answer. "You are to come up to dinner to-night," exclaimed Bonnie, when the drive was nearly over, "and to-morrow we are to dine at the Dene. Amabel and Joslyn are there, so Lady Margaret has asked us. I must put you down at the white gate, as Uncle Alick asked me to take some things to Gatty."

"Is Mr. Redford away, Bonnie?" asked Eden presently, when they had come in sight of the gate.

"Yes, he has gone over to Wyngate about a foal, but he will be back to dinner; mind you are in good time, Eden;" and then the dog-cart rattled off.

Eden had soon finished her unpacking; then, as it was a lovely afternoon, she took her book into the porch, and watched the pigeons strutting amongst the bracken. Presently they rose, with a great fluttering of wings, as though suddenly startled, and flew up to the roof, and the next moment Mr. Redford came round the house. His appearance seemed to take Eden by surprise, and she greeted him rather silently.



"Well," he asked, rather abruptly, "have I startled you? Why are you looking so pale? Your holiday does not seem to have benefited you much. Are you going to ask me to sit down?"

Then Eden mutely made room for him.

"I have had a long tramp from Wyngate, but I have got back earlier than I expected."

"Shall I ask Susan to give you some tea?" inquired Eden, mindful of her hospitality. "I finished mine half an hour ago."

But the Squire shook his head. "No, thank you; Mrs. Dodd gave me an excellent cup. I tried to get back early, because I wanted to speak to you, and I knew I should find you here."

"Yes, Bonnie left me at the white gate; she has gone on to the Retreat."

Then she waited; but Mr. Redford remained silent; he seemed nervous and ill at ease.

"There is something you want to say to me?" she hazarded at last. Then he got up from his seat, and leant against the trellis-work of the porch. As he turned his face to her, his expression startled Eden—it was so full of repressed emotion.

"Yes," he returned, with curious abruptness;

"I wanted to tell you that this absurd arrangement must cease—that it does not suit me at all. I want these rooms for another purpose, and, in short, we cannot go on like this any longer."

"Do you mean I am to go?" asked Eden. Her voice trembled as she put the question, and she turned quite white. Why was he so rough and abrupt with her? What had she done that she should be dismissed like this?

The troubled look brought the Squire to his senses.

"No," he returned, very gently; "you could not believe I meant that; but it is true we cannot go on like this. No man in my position could endure it for a week." Then he sat down beside her and took her hand. "Eden," he said, in a firm voice, "I have grown to love you very dearly, and your presence is necessary to my happiness. I think you are not quite indifferent to me. During these last weeks I have watched, and I have ventured to hope. Will you come to Heatherwood as its mistress, and be the blessing of mine and Bonnie's life?"

Mr. Redford's proposal had not taken Eden absolutely by surprise. For some weeks his

manner had softened to her, and some strong chord of sympathy seemed drawing them together; so, though her lips were pale with emotion, and her voice was not quite steady, her answer fully satisfied him. She respected and trusted him with all her heart, and could assure him that his affection was returned; and though his words of thanks were few, the pressure of his hand and the look he gave her were eloquent enough. A little later, as they still sat talking over their new happiness, Eden asked him shyly how long he had cared for her.

Mr. Redford smiled. "You have asked me a difficult question, dear. I believe I liked you from the first. It is true I took very little notice of you; but I found myself watching you, and listening when you spoke to any one else. I remember I told Lady Margaret that you were a sweet woman; but it was those evenings at Brighton that clinched matters. Oh, dearest, you little imagined, as you read aloud to us, that I was thinking how I was to win you for my wife."

A lovely blush came to Eden's face as she listened to this. In her happiness she looked

years younger. "I am glad to know this," she whispered. "I never dared to question myself why I looked forward so intensely to those Saturday evenings, and why Monday was always so dreary."

Then Alick Redford laughed, and his arm pressed her more closely. "I think I can guess the reason, dear. We have cared for each other longer than we suppose it. Oh, Eden, my darling, if you knew what a rest it is to me to love a good woman, and to trust her as I trust you——" and he sighed with intensity of feeling.

"And now I shall have the right to comfort you," replied Eden softly. "There is one thing that troubles me: do you think Bonnie will be glad about this?"

"I think so. Shall we go and ask her?" And then, as they walked hand-in-hand through the little wood in the sweet evening light, Eden felt as though she had entered into her woman's paradise, and that a new world lay round her.

Bonnie came out to meet them—she was wondering at their long absence. When she saw their faces, she changed colour, and her eyes widened with astonishment—for why was Uncle

Alick holding Eden's hand? But she was soon to be enlightened.

"Bonnie, my dear," he said abruptly, "this dear lady has promised to live here and be my wife. You will welcome her, will you not, my child, for she will make us both very happy?"

Bonnie did not answer for a moment, and her eyes were full of tears. "Oh, Uncle Alick, do you really mean this?" she gasped.

Then Eden put her arm gently round the girl. "Dear Bonnie, are you not glad that I should make him happy? I cannot be quite comfortable until you tell me that."

Then Bonnie suddenly threw her arms round Eden neck. "Oh, I am glad. I will be glad; but just at first I felt so horrid. I thought you had taken him from me; but, of course, I know I was wrong. Dear Uncle Alick, please kiss me, and tell me you will never be less fond of your poor little Bonnie."

Then, as she clung sobbing to him, Mr. Redford's eyes were rather dim.

"Nonsense, my pet; do you suppose anything could come between us? Can I not have a wife and daughter too?"

EDEN PUT HER ARM GENTLY ROUND THE GIRL.

[*Page* 316.

Then Bonnie dried her eyes and absolutely giggled. "I shall call her Aunt Eden," she said. "I must begin at once, Uncle Alick." And though Eden protested against this with many blushes, my Lady Frivol was not to be repressed.

"I really am glad," she said, at the end of the evening, as she followed Eden up to her room, when she went to put on her hat, while the Squire lighted his lantern. "My feelings were a little mixed at first, for I did not quite like the idea of being the mistress of Heatherwood no longer: but, of course, I know it will be better for Uncle Alick. He is dreadfully fond of you, Eden; his eyes follow you everywhere, and he has been quite miserable all the week without you. We shall be as cosy as possible, shall we not?" But Bonnie's eyes were a little wistful as she put the question.

The engagement was announced to Lady Margaret the next evening, when they dined at the Dene; and though the slow tears of age gathered in the blind eyes as she wished them joy, there was nothing in her manner to Eden to show that her secret wish for years had been that Alick and Ethel Graham might learn to care for

each other; but, with her fine delicacy, she had never hinted at this wish to either of them.

"You have chosen wisely, my dear Alick," she said to him when he wished her good-night. "Miss Lloyd is a dear creature; she will make you and Bonnie very happy."

"I am sure of that," he returned; "and she will do more than that—she will comfort me for my past. After all, my dear old friend, sweetness and goodness are better than cleverness and beauty;" and he wondered why Lady Margaret sighed as she said "Yes."

"God bless him and her too," she said to herself when she was left alone; "I do not grudge them their happiness. Well, I am an old fool; but though such an idea never entered her head, I always thought that Alick was the only man who could have made Ethel forget her past; but when I am gone she will be a lonely woman." But Lady Margaret was wrong, for Ethel Graham's future was a bright one.

Before the summer closed Eden became Alick Redford's wife. During their brief honeymoon Bonnie remained at the Dene.

Under its new mistress's sway Heatherwood was considered one of the pleasantest homes in the neighbourhood. Bonnie was nearly grown up, and, as Eden pointed out to her husband, it was their duty to gather good society round them, and to give her every possible advantage.

Alick Redford made no objection—happiness and a mind at rest had overcome his taciturnity. For the first time his neighbours found him sociable.

"Eden has made it quite a different house," observed Bonnie to Mrs. Ferard; "and as for Uncle Alick, he looks years younger."

Yes, to Eden her good things had come in rich abundance, and her life-cup was filled to the brim; in her sweet, womanly way she strove to share her happiness with others.

Her nieces, Ella and Maisie, spent happy weeks at Heatherwood; and Ivy had her wish, and lay on a couch in the wild garden, listening to the birds and watching bees and butterflies through many a long summer day; and in their holidays Cecil and Owen were always welcome.

As time went on there were other children's voices to be heard—sturdy boys and bright-faced

girls, who rode on Alick's shoulder or cantered beside him on long-tailed ponies, and to whom Bonnie was the most charming of aunts.

"Vhy does dad call 'oo Lady Frivol?" asked one little maiden, as she trotted by Bonnie's side; and the blue eyes were full of childish perplexity. "Is it because 'oo is going to marry Lord Jossin?"

"Hush! Madge, here he comes;" and Bonnie blushed very becomingly, for the tall young soldier coming down the garden path had evidently heard every word.

"Bravo! Madge, my little sweetheart!" exclaimed Lord Joslyn, as he lifted the little one to her favourite perch on his shoulder; "you've hit the nail famously." Then, dropping his voice, he continued, "Grannie sends her dear love, Bonnie, and I am to bring you to her at once."

FINIS

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